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classic gamer magazine

Vol 2 Issue 2
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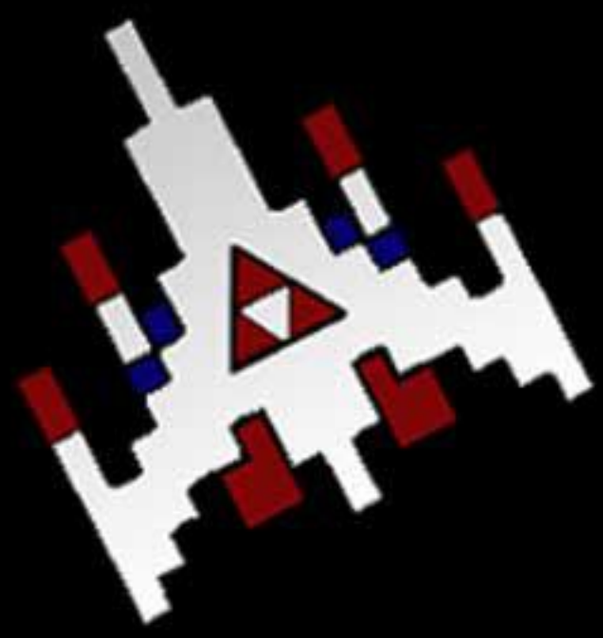

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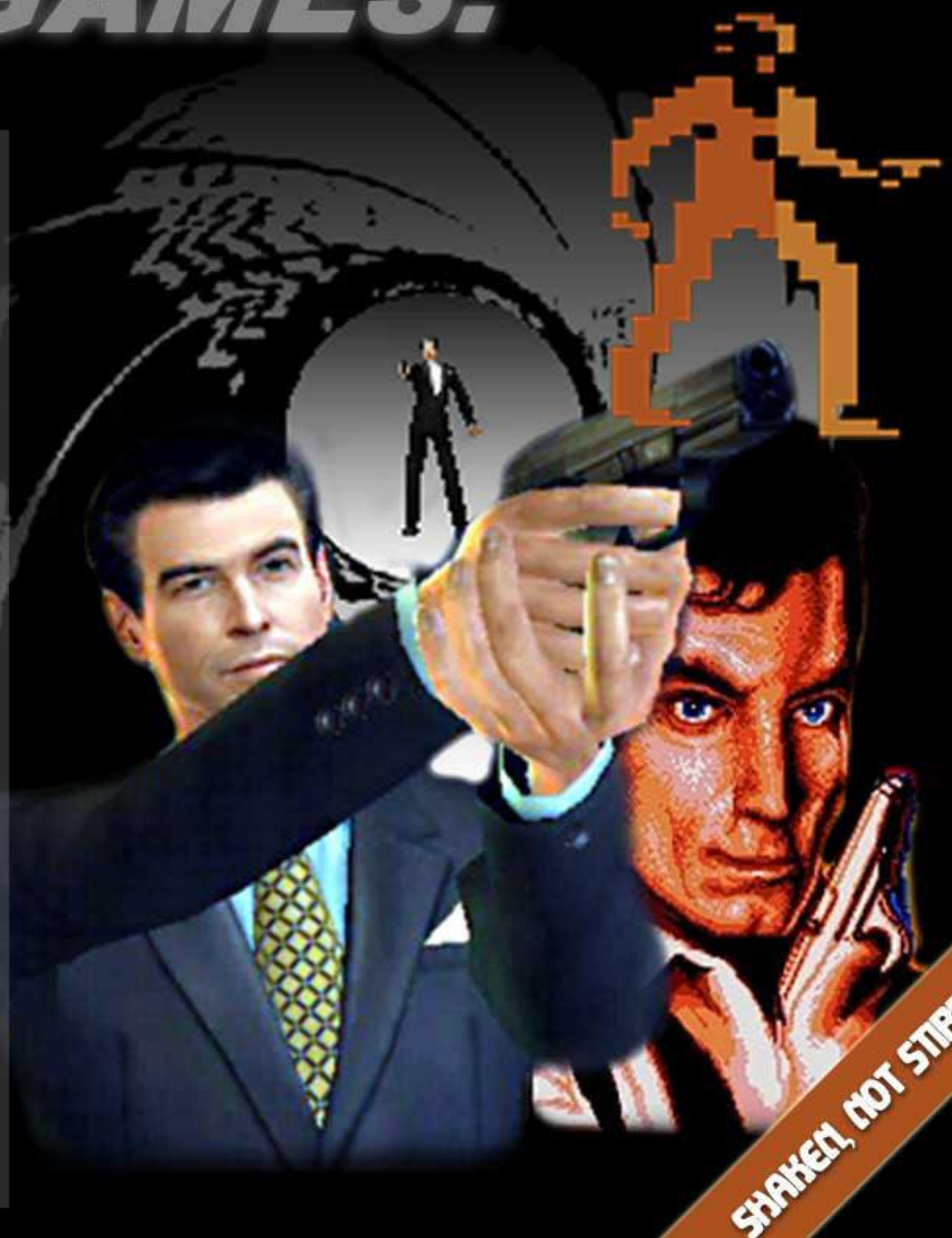
THE ROAD TO 300

DONKEY KONG AT 10



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- N-Gage
- NeoGeo
- NeoGeo CD
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- Odyssey
- PC-FX
- Pico
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- Playstation
- Playstation 2
- RCA Studio 2
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classic gamer magazine

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RESET

There were two times a year a kid could always look forward to: Christmas and the last day of school. If you played video games, these days held special significance since you could usually count on getting new games for Christmas, while the last day of school meant three uninterrupted glorious months of playing them. Sadly, we can no longer waste the long and hot days searching for the Golden Chalice and slaying dragons, but we can still pause to celebrate this summer ritual long gone. It seems that gaming meets and conventions are becoming the norm of the summer months. There are no less than ten shows planned for 2004, not to mention the groups of classic gaming fans that get together to simply hang out and talk and play games. We'll do our best to keep you apprised of the coming shows, while providing reports from past events. This issue features a firsthand account of a meeting held at an arcade in Ann Arbor, Michigan and the writer's initial apprehension of attending.

Also in this issue you may notice our articles take a slight shift to the right in the gaming timeline. It is our hope that with each issue we will be able to provide as much coverage as we possibly can for all of the various systems, but sometimes we are going to shine the sunlight a bit brighter on the later systems in order to give the old woodgrain workhorse and Intellivision a well-deserved rest. With that, it's time to break out the vodka martinis and curl up next to some leggy supermodels while you enjoy our latest foray into classic games.

-Cav

CGM Editors and Contributors

An avid game enthusiast and collector, ***Scott Alan Marriott*** worked as All Game Guide's senior editor before switching gears to become a freelance writer. Making his *Classic Gamer Magazine* debut, Scott's other writing credits include reviews and previews at TechTV's *X-Play*.

Skyler Miller's work has appeared on Salon.com, TechTV's *X-Play*, GameSpot, and All Game Guide. In 2001, he was interviewed by CBC Radio about the 40th anniversary of the first computer game.

Todd Deci makes his debut this month with a personal look at ***Warioware, Inc.*** Todd has written literally thousands of descriptions and reviews for All Game Guide and enjoys rousing philosophical discussions over an ice cold Bell's Oberon beer.

We are pleased to have ***Geoffrey Miller*** on board as an expert on imports. Geoffrey previously wrote for *Manci Games Magazine*.

Chris Larson is *the* Fatman of Fatmangames.com (yet oddly enough isn't fat). Chris climbs aboard this issue to give us his thoughts on a local video game meet.

Yes, the rumors are true. ***Chris Lion*** makes his triumphant return to the pages of this Magazine. Chris will once again grace the back page and is looking forward to signing scads of autographs at CGExpo.

RTS and FPS fan extraordinaire, ***Mark Hoogland*** has written numerous descriptions and reviews for All Game Guide. And for some reason he wants to be a lawyer.

Cartoonist extraordinaire, ***Russ Collins*** joins up to provide us with his 'tooning talents. Russ has a comprehensive website dedicated to videogames (and more comic strips!) at www.bitsmack.com.

Michael Thomasson runs Gooddealgames.com, a website dedicated to classic gaming , publishing, and selling. His column, "Just for QIX," shows off his vast knowledge of gaming. Michael also teaches "The History of Videogames" at Canisius College in Buffalo, New York.

Chris Cavanaugh has helped cover E3 for GameSpy Industries and is currently an editor with All Game Guide. Chris started *Classic Gamer Magazine* in 1999 and has been flocked by adoring women ever since .

Mark Androich has written over 13 video game strategy guides, and is a reviews writer and editor for *PSE2 Magazine.*

Earl Green is the webmaster of www.theLogBook.com, which covers music, movies, DVDs, classic video games, books, and toy collecting. He has written for All Game Guide, and has a regular column at *Digital Press.* Earl has also been called upon for expert opinions on everything from Star Trek to driving-games by such newspapers as the Las Vegas Sun and the Baltimore Sun.

Send us your thoughts, compliments, rants, feedback and insults!

Feedback@classicgamer.com

I INSIST YOU TAKE MY MONEY!

It is great to see Classic Gamer back! I know it is much easier to have an online magazine. Classic Gamer had great content and I hope to see you stick around. Any thought to making paid online subscriptions? We would pay (via PayPal) for a subscription and then get the magazine. We could print it out in color if we want and have it somewhat like a magazine sent in the mail. I know this would greatly reduce readers, but it may keep the magazine going and create a more loyal community. I just know that free online efforts seldom last long and there may be enough of us willing to pay for strong articles. You are hitting at a good time in some ways in that Retrogaming Times is stopping and maybe you both could combine into a small fee for subscription classic gaming online newsletter. Regardless, keep up the good work.

-Ransom G. (aka RangerG on AtariAge)

Hey, i really like the depth and range of your classic gamer magazine, I got sent a link for a free issue (Vol. 2, Issue 1) by a mate. How will you be putting them out in the future, I see you have all of last volumes available on CD for $10, but as you put them out issue by issue (every month or whatever) will be charging by PayPal per issue or will they still be free or what? anyway good job and hope to hear from you soon.

-Craig

Thanks Ransom and Craig! Actually we did consider putting up a PayPal "donation jar" but quickly decided against it. Since our overhead is much lower by putting the magazine on the net we thought we'd pass the savings onto the reader! In lieu of dough, all we ask is that you help spread the word that we're back and we're free.

THE BOYS FROM BRAZIL

Guys, it's amazing how ol..., I mean, classic stuff can be so refreshingly interesting. As an enthusiast of Atari 2600 and MSX, I agree that a good game does not depend on the platform. I support the idea CGM should eventually have an article about computer games, such as Commodore and MSX… No further compliments or it could sound like "Guys send me a gift," but… CGM RULES!!!! Please, do publish it monthly, or weekly, would you?

Fernando Antonio Tasso
(from São Paulo, Brazil)

Yo!! My name is Marcelo Nietto and live in São Paulo, Brazil. I am writing because I liked the Classic Gamer Magazine! Congratulations for the initiative and I wait that it continues for long time! I like of videogames since Telejogo until PlayStation 2 but my favourite videogame is the 3DO. When the Classic Gamer will make some review/material on the 3DO and its games? It would like to ask for that my email was published in the section of letters of the next edition and also my site about videogame 3DO

-Marcelo Nietto
http://www.universo3do.cjb.net

ITSA GOOD!

Hey, i just wanted to say i really enjoyed the article about Mario Adventure. Any NES related hacking activity getting coverage can be pretty exciting, and seeing the article definitely felt good, so you get my Two Thumbs of Greatness pointed in your direction.

-Gavin
http://gavin.panicus.org

PlayStation

"Just wanted to let you know, I just checked out the new Classic Gamer. Nice job, guys. Not only is it super cool to see something like that out there, but to see that some guys I at least sort of worked with years ago were behind it was an added bonus. I especially liked seeing Baseball Simulator 1.000 get some props. I know this is a labor of love for you guys, and I just wanted to tell you that I love it as a reader. Best of luck with future issues."

-Chris Baker
Reviews Editor
Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine

"Your magazine kicks ass."

-D.B. Weiss
Author of Lucky Wander Boy
www.luckywanderboy.com

AtariAge

"Glad to see that Classic Gamer Magazine is back! It's interesting how all these classic gaming magazines are now popping up around the same time, some printed, some not. I must say, CGM is one of the best looking of the bunch."

-Al Yarusso
www.AtariAge.com

FROM JUSTIN TO SILENT BOB

Firstly, I want to thank you for the hard work and effort that went in to creating the Classic Gamer magazine, which you have graciously provided for free online. I had a blast reading about some of my favorite old-skool games, and admit I had to break a smile when I found Kevin Smith and I share the same fave Atari game, Combat.

-Justin Kyle

PLEASE SET YOUR WAYBACK MACHINES

I just got done reading Vol. 2 issue 1, and I liked it a lot. As far as suggestions go, I'd like to see more reminiscing articles, ones that are like little vignettes from back in the day. I like reading about other peoples' memories of the classic gaming era.

A SLASHDOT VISITOR SPEAKS

Your site was covered by Slashdot and I perused the downloadable issue #1. I spent the most time looking at the rare title reviews and the celebrity news letter responses. I was interested in the rare title area as I spent many a long hour looking for Sega 32X and Sega CD games only to find them average to poor at best. (Kilobri was pretty) I feel the pain of your other readers. I may have to dig out the Atari 2600 just to play Tooth Protectors and Kool Aid Man. I enjoyed the issue and I could read it while on lunch to boot. Nice!

-Jason Herington

A FEW SUGGESTIONS FOR YA

Here are a few random ideas for future articles/columns:

1. I love the "Room of Doom" section from Tips 'N Tricks magazine -- a derivative of that could fit a page nicely as long as you get a few decent photo submissions. I volunteer for one... I promise the photo will be crisp, clean, and ready to go. My collection is humble, but I love seeing other people's set-up so maybe mine would be interesting.

2. Classic Videogame Endings - maybe a little generic, but I never get tired of it. Plus I forgot what happened at the end of Ninja Gaiden 1 for NES and I'm too lazy to try that again... don't make me! You needn't be limited to classics, either. Maybe just "Best Videogame Endings".

3. With the release of Metroid: Zero Mission, the popularity of Speed Runs and Sequence Breaking seems to have reached the Japanese designers. Zero Mission was definitely designed with Speed and Low Percentage runs in mind. I'd love to see the best times published monthly for some of the more popular titles.

Keep up the good work, and tell your wives/girlfriends I said “Thank You” For letting you do this little thing for us. Mine already hates my GBA SP. But she still keeps me around, I don't know why.

-Greg Bandera

A NOTE FROM DOWN UNDER

Howdy,

I just finished reading the first issue of the new CGM volume, and wanted to let you know that I think you've done a brilliant job. I spent more time reading and enjoying this then I do most physical mags I get, well done! I look forward to future issues and hope you're able to keep up the great work.

Kind regards,
Glen C
Australia

Feedback@classicgamer.com

Alert reader John Silva wrote in to get an update of the magazine release and also casually mentioned that not only was he friends with Ione Skye (*River's Edge*, *Say Anything*), but that he also got together with her from time to time to play classic videogames. John then offered to see if he could get her to let us know what her favorite videogames are/were as sort of a follow-up to our Games of Fame article last issue. Naturally, being very big fans of shameless name dropping (as well as big fans of hers), we encouraged him wholeheartedly. She was kind enough to send the following message:

Dear Classic Gamer,

Thanks for being a fan of mine. I liked your last issue .John showed it to me and it was awesome. I really liked the trash or treasure one. I played some of those games back in the 80s. Anyway, I'd have to say I like ***Clu Clu Land****. It is a really underappreciated puzzle game and also that little furry red guy is so cute! I heard that they are re-releasing it for the Game Boy, so hopefully if I can get my hands on an SP I'll be able to play it. I wish you guys the best and hope that I'll be featured soon.*

Love Always,
-- Ione Skye

NEWS ROUNDUP

UPCOMING SHOWS

VIDEO GAME SUMMIT

July 17, 2004
Lombard, IL
Fairfield Inn and Suites

http://avc.atari-users.net/Events/FestVGS.html

VINTAGE COMPUTER FESTIVAL

July 16-17
Burlington, MA
Sun Microsystems Campus

http://www.vintage.org/

CLASSIC GAMING EXPO

There's still time to register early for this year's Classic Gaming Expo, which will be held August 21 and 22 at the San Jose McEnery Convention Center. For more details, visit www.cgexpo.com.

Retrogaming Times Is Reborn

Issue #1 of Retrogaming Times Monthly, formerly Retrogaming Times, is now available. It's still free, with mostly the same retrogaming goodies, but with a new editor, Adam King, taking over for Tom Zjaba This month's issue contains 11 articles, with most of the writing staff and regular columns returning. Congratulations to Tom for a great run! http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RTM/RTM_Home.htm

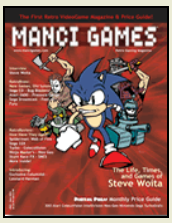
Space Taxi 2

Everyone's favorite yellow cab is back! You might remember the original ***Space Taxi***. It was a very popular Commodore 64 title back in 1984 when it was first released. This is the first official sequel. It was created by Twilight Games with the help of the original author John F. Kutcher. ***Space Taxi 2*** features 26 levels in 3 unique environments. A free demo version of Space Taxi is available from Twilight Games and features the first 8 levels of the game. http://www.twilightgames.com/

Ocean Depths for Jaguar CD

Ocean Depths, the new slide show, preview, and mini-game from Starcat Developments for the Jaguar CD is now available online at Songbird. And while you're visiting Songbird, be sure to check out other recent releases such as ***JAG-ADS CD***, ***Painter CD***, and ***Alpine Games*** for the Lynx. http://songbird-productions.com

Manci Games Closes Shop



After two issues of publication, Manci Games, a print magazine dedicated to classic games, ceased publication. Back issues and a PDF version of issue #2 are available at http://www.mancigames.com/.

Maniac Mansion Deluxe

LucasFan Games has released a remake of ***Maniac Mansion*** for modern PCs called ***Maniac Mansion Deluxe***. The game can be downloaded for free at http://people.freenet.de/lucasfangames/maniac/games_eng.htm, where you will also find a sequel to ***Zak McKracken***.

NES SP

Nintendo has released the Classic NES series for the Game Boy Advance. Along with a special version of the GBA SP fashioned to look like the NES, the series includes eight cartridges with emulated versions of ***Bomberman***, ***Donkey Kong***, ***Excitebike***, ***Ice Climber***, ***The Legend of Zelda***, ***Pac-Man***, ***Super Mario Bros.*** and ***Xevious***. Each game retails for $19.99, and the SP hardware for $99.99. We will have reviews of each title next issue.

Classic Games Are Popular on UK Cell Phones

According to ELSPA, a UK publisher association, ***Pac-Man*** was the most downloaded game in April for mobile phones in that country. ***Tetris*** was number two, and ***Space Invaders*** ranked tenth.

Jimmy Bricketti is sent to the mean and blocky streets in this hilarious send up of the popular Rockstar Games franchise. Creators Billy Fitzgerald, Ronn LeFeuvre, and Deon White started work on the short film as a college project and completed it in 11 weeks.

Grand Theft Auto: Lego City is available in both QuickTime and DIVX format and can be downloaded at: http://brickflick.com

Want a classic arcade on a paper-thin budget? Then check out the **Paper Arcade** where you can print out templates that can be folded into your favorite arcade machines. Choose from six machines: ***Defender***, ***Gravitar***, ***Gauntlet***, ***Pac-Man***, ***Robotron***, and ***Tempest.***

http://www.wayoftherodent.com/gd101/bs_paperarcade.htm

Below the Radar

If you're not keeping an eye on every game that has been released, some classic-related titles can slip right past you. We'll try to keep you informed of any games that come out that may go unnoticed, such as budget-minded jewel case titles, "quiet" releases, and retail exclusives.

Atari Retro (Palm OS, N-Gage) Compatible with the Palm operating system (Including the Nokia N-Gage) this compilation includes seven Atari VCS titles: ***Adventure***, ***Asteroids***, ***Breakout***, ***Centipede***, **Missile Command**, ***Pong***, and ***Yars' Revenge***.

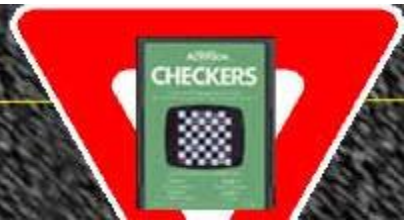
Capcom Arcade Hits Volume 1 (PC) This jewel case release from SelectSoft Games offers two popular arcade titles on one CD: ***Street Fighter*** and ***Street Fighter II***.

Break! (PC) Fans of ***Breakout*** and ***Arkanoid*** may want to pick up this jewel case released by eGames. Comprised of seven complete games, players will collect power-ups, bonuses, and avoid obstacles while smashing bricks through over 500 levels.

Sega Mega Pack (PC) This huge collection of Sega titles boasts eight complete titles for your PC. But that doesn't tell the whole story since several of the titles include many games per disc. Solo titles include ***Crazy Taxi***, ***Sega Bass Fishing***, ***Sonic R***, ***Virtua Fighter 2***, and ***Sonic CD.*** Compilation titles include ***Sega Smash Pack*** (***Super Shinobi***, ***Vectorman***, ***Altered Beast***, ***Sonic Spinball***, ***Columns***, ***Outrun***, ***Phantasy Star 2***, and ***Golden Axe***), ***Sega Smash Pack 2*** (***Sonic the Hedgehog 2***, ***Shining Force***, ***Vectorman 2***, ***Super Hang On***, ***Kid Chameleon***, ***Comix Zone***, and ***Flicky***), and ***Sonic and Knuckles Collection*** (***Sonic the Hedgehog 3***, ***Sonic & Knuckles***, and ***Sonic 3 & Knuckles***).

Snap! Classic Arcade Jewel Case Line (PC) Many of these releases were only available as part of a compilation, but Topics Entertainment has published these classic arcade titles in a single jewel case format. The most notable remake in this collection is ***Warlords***, previously available in the Atari Revival package.

THE ROAD TO 300



By Mark Androvich

Back in the day when my Atari 2600 was brand new and still smelled of plastic, I used to receive a handful of cartridges each year: one for my birthday, two at Christmas, and perhaps two for special events throughout the year. If I managed to save up my allowance, I might also purchase another one from time to time. When the video game market crashed, I had owned my system a mere four years and amassed a collection of just 15-20 games. At the time, I decided I was more interested in computers, and I left my Atari 2600 behind when I went off to college.

It wasn't until grad school that I finally became an owner of a couple of new systems. I bought a 7800 for $50, since no one else wanted one, and I ended up asking for an NES for Christmas after renting the unit and several games. The NES was also marked down in price, as the SNES had just been released. I purchased a handful of titles for each of them, but neither recaptured the magic I had felt with the original 2600.

Then, one fateful day in the late 1980s, I got bit by the collecting bug. After hooking up with a few fellow collectors through The 2600 Connection fanzine, I decided to start collecting 2600 games in earnest. I started visiting flea markets and swap meets, and soon moved on to scouring thrift stores. I was fortunate to live in a town that had three or four such thrift stores within a few blocks from each other, allowing me to make the rounds nearly every weekend. I took out a classified ad in the newspaper, asked friends for their old games, and even traded away some of my comic book collection to obtain hard-to-find games (A handful of Marvel comics for a ***Chase The Chuck Wagon*** seemed like a good trade).

In a relatively short period of time, I managed to collect well over 100 different cartridges, most of them loose, at prices ranging from 50 cents to 5 dollars. By the time I had run out of steam some three years later, I had around 250 games in my collection and I had paid as much as 100 dollars for one of them (a signed ***Cubicolor***). By then, I had moved on to other systems (a PlayStation) and other responsibilities that occupied my time (a house, a wife, and two kids). It was getting harder and harder to find games I didn't already own, and even when eBay made finding those games easier, I couldn't justify spending my kids' college funds on the cartridges I needed. My collection ended at a grand total of 290 different 2600 games.

How I hated that number! 290. So very close to 300, which sounds much better. "How many Atari cartridges do you have?" "290" "Oh, is that all?" "How many do you have?" "300." "Wow! That's incredible!" See what I mean? It just sounds better. I therefore resolved to obtain a mere 10 more cartridges to help me reach that magic number. This is the story of how I did it.

First, I went through Digital Press and made a list of the games I didn't have in my collection, noting the rarity of each. I also included the rarity from the Atari Age web site as a "second opinion." Eliminating label variations, overseas titles, and Sears versions, I pared down the list to a mere 109 titles I was interested in. Then I eliminated the rarest of the rare games, specifically ***Condor Attack***, ***Eli's Ladder***, ***Gauntlet***, ***Magicard***, ***Mangia***, ***Obelix***, ***Quadrun***, ***River Patrol***, and ***Video Life***. That left my "want" list at an even 100.

1. Thrift Stores

Ah, the old standby! Even though I had struck out in the past, I figured I would start with thrift stores. Little did I know, I apparently live in an "exclusive" area. Although there are collection vans all over town, there is not a single Goodwill or other thrift store near my house! Strike one!

2. eBay

I didn't expect to be able to afford ***Condor Attack*** even when I saw one, but there were a few games on my list that were up for auction. I put in bids on ten of them: ***Double Dragon***, ***Earth Dies Screaming***, ***Frostbite***, ***Gangster Alley***, ***I Want My Mommy***, ***Math Gran Prix***, ***Mr. Do!***, ***Quest For Quintana Roo***, ***Quick Step***, and ***Radar Lock***. The auction lengths ranged from one to four days. Even though I entered sensible bids from $5 to $15, I figured that with my luck I would get outbid at the last second.

I was right! I lost two of the games with 40 seconds or less remaining in the auction, and was the second highest bidder on three of the games. I was quite surprised to see ***Double Dragon*** go for $21.53, although I expected to see ***Radar Lock*** ($17.53) and ***I Want My Mommy*** ($22.01) to sell in the range they did. (***Condor Attack*** went for $113.62, by the way).

291 Math Gran Prix
One of the two eBay auctions I won. I didn't need to use my math skills, as this one went for only $1.50.

292 Gangster Alley
The final title I won in an eBay auction…for $4.26.

#294
Cosmic Commuter

3. R.G.V.C.

Next, I posted a message on rec.games.video.classic noting my attempt to reach 300 and asking for help to achieve my goal. I received many trade requests, despite the fact that I had nothing to trade. Everyone who owns these cartridges seems to be a collector, so they don't want to get rid of any of these games unless they get one back in return. Damn! Where are the people who are in it just for the money?

Luckily for me, I was able to hook up with a collector who valued some of the more modern video games and game-related items that I had in my collection. Even though we had already made a deal previously, before I started my quest for 300, he decided to throw two carts in because he knew that I needed them. What a guy!

#293
Quick Step

4. Classic Gaming Expo

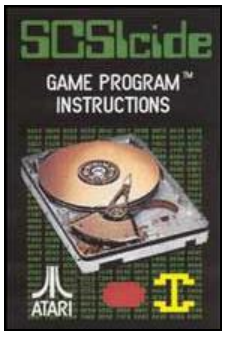
The annual Classic Gaming Expo came right in the middle of my quest. I figured that this ought to be a good place to pick up some hard to find titles, right? Not to mention the exclusive homebrews…

#295 Combat Two
#296 Elevator Action

Should I count these? Why not? These two unreleased Atari games were resurrected and released at the 2001 Classic Gaming Expo complete with boxes, instructions, and labels. Price: $30 (***Combat II***) and $40 (***Elevator Action***)

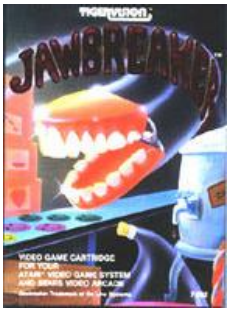
#297 SCSIcide

I responded to Joe Grand's announcement of a new game a while ago. Good thing I did! At CGE, the remaining games went very quickly. Price: $25.



#298 Fathom
#299 Jawbreaker

I broke down and purchased these two from the 2600.com booth at CGE2K1. I paid $10.50 for ***Fathom*** and $32 for ***Jawbreaker***. Although that last one was pricey, the reason I wanted it was because the game's programmer, John Harris, was in attendance at the show. After hanging out with him during the past few shows, I knew him well enough to ask if he would sign it for me. He did, making it worth the purchase price, but as it turns out he doesn't even have a copy of his own game! (Sadly, there were no more available for purchase at the show).

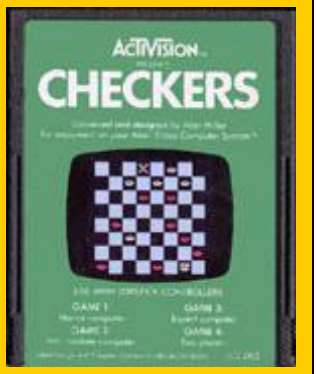


5. #300 Checkers

This was it! My 300th game! It seems very fitting that the game that allowed me to reach my goal didn't come from a thrift store, an eBay auction, or a direct sale. Instead, it came as a free gift from a fellow collector. Of all the people who replied to my newsgroup post, John Greeve was the only one who offered me a game on my "want" list free of charge. He made the trip out from Wisconsin to Classic Gaming Expo in Las Vegas, where we managed to hook up. Despite the fact that he is a Packers fan (and I'm still smarting from their defeat of the 49'ers in the playoffs), I couldn't turn down his offer.

Thanks to John, and his extra copy of Activision ***Checkers,*** I now own 300 Atari 2600 games. And with that, I can now rest easily, putting my collecting days behind me.

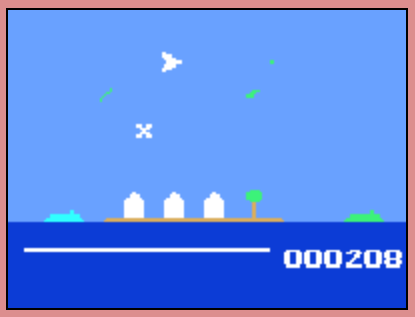
Of course, that means "400" is now a mere 100 titles away!



HOMEBREW REVIEWS

Kill the Attacking Aliens

Programmer: Sören Gust
System: Odyssey 2



2004 is turning into the year of the Odyssey2 homebrew, with the recently-released ***Planet Lander*** and this game breathing some new life into Magnavox's old system. And if ***Kill the Attacking Aliens*** has anything to say about it, the Odyssey2 is taking its rightful place alongside the 2600 in the "wow, I didn't know this system could do that!" category. The game combines elements of ***Defender*** and ***Missile Command***, with an endless barrage of incoming alien ships (and their hostile fire), and players in a nimble defense ship trying to intercept any or all of the above before ground-based targets -- trees, houses, submarines, etc. -- are taken out.

Considering the legendary underpowered nature of the system, ***Kill The Attacking Aliens*** has a lot going on. A running meter of the player's shield strength (and remaining lives), various custom sprites and combinations of existing ones from the Odyssey's fixed character set, and quite the lively color palette. The game's fast and furious action requires split-second decisions: will an incoming alien missile hit a target or land harmlessly? Can the missile be hit by a laser shot, or require more direct intervention? Players can intercept some fire directly by putting their ship in the way, but the resulting shield damage can mount quickly. The game has numerous power-ups to help in that area, though (another Odyssey2 first). ***Kill The Attacking Aliens*** is fast, nerve-wracking fun with a strong retro vibe, and hopefully just the first sign of an Odyssey2 renaissance.

-- Earl Green

Homebrew Previews

By Chris Cavanaugh

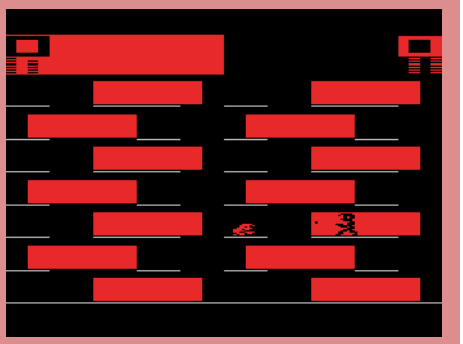
Adventure II

Programmers: Ron Lloyd, Keith Erickson, Alan Davis
System: Atari 5200

Adventure II, the much anticipated sequel to ***Adventure***, is on track to be released later this summer. Designed by Ron Lloyd, Keith Erickson, and Alan Davis, ***Adventure II*** promises larger environments, more obstacles and mazes, and new enemies including a troll and minotaur. Players will once again be pursued by three dragons while searching the kingdom for the Golden Chalice. You can follow progress on its development here:
http://cafeman.www9.50megs.com/atari/5200dev/Adventure2.html

Fade Out

Programmers: Christopher Tumber, Adam Tierny
System: Atari 2600



Christopher Tumber and GBA artist Adam Tierny are putting their heads together to create ***Fade Out***, a two-player only title that has two assassins gunning for each other in an abandoned warehouse full of moving platforms. The assassins are the same colors as the background colors, which allows them to blend into their environment for surprise attacks. Difficulty switches will be utilized to account for player handicaps in strength, energy, and weapon power. No release date has been set.

MAMEUSEMENTS

By Scott Alan Marriott

There is a deep-rooted fascination with penguins in Japan, which explains why there are more than a handful of video games starring the flightless bird, with Sega's ***Pengo*** being the country's most famous offspring here in the States. At first glance, ***Penguin Kun-Wars*** is yet another bright, bouncy, and cheerful game from the Land of the Rising Sun. Yet underneath its charming exterior is a devilishly challenging game that's sure to ruffle a few feathers.

Though the title suggests a blast-fest or possibly a strategy game for control of Antarctica, ***Penguin Kun-Wars*** is a sporting event of sorts, with gameplay a strange mix of dodgeball and ping-pong. You are, not surprisingly, a penguin, and you have apparently signed a waiver to compete in a 16-critter tournament against a lineup of adorable koala bears, pandas, beavers, and mice. The main viewpoint is not unlike tennis, with the camera fixed behind your penguin in the foreground and an opponent in the background. In the first match, a crowd of energized animals lines the stands, though none appear to be penguins.

Is the character alone in his athletic pursuit? Is this penguin the last of his kind? These questions are never fully answered, so we must instead focus on the tournament at hand. The field of play is a wide table, with one character appearing on opposite ends. Five red balls are lined up on either side, and the object is to make sure your opponent is stuck with all ten balls on his side of the table. Doing so ends the game, but there is also a 60-second time limit to keep things interesting. If time expires, he who has the least number of balls (on his side of the table) is considered the winner.

Winning isn't easy, as balls that collide with each other ricochet in different directions, and with the often frantic shuffling left and right, the game often degenerates into a heated "hot potato" contest. Of course, with two characters sliding balls across a table, you might wonder how the game avoids becoming a continuous stalemate. If a ball manages to hit an animal, the critter will fall backwards, momentarily stunned. This is the key to victory, as you're allowed to keep slinging balls at the paralyzed foe until your side is cleared. Needless to say, anyone who was pelted at gym class will find ***Penguin Kun-Wars*** a cathartic experience.

Despite the ability to knock your opponent into a daze, ***Penguin Kun-Wars*** is a frustrating game. The animal rivals are cuddly cutthroats that seem to recover a tad faster than you after a hit and can toss balls at a faster rate. Perhaps flippers are no substitute for paws, which may explain why you're the only penguin brave enough to enter the tournament in the first place. At any rate, each game is considered a "set," and you have to win two sets to advance to the next opponent.

The game also throws in a few surprises at various points, including a jellybean/slug-type creature that acts as a moving barrier, and a ticking bomb that results in an instant win if it explodes near your opponent. In between matches are three types of mini-games played for bonus points, including air hockey and whac-a-mole variants. Overall, ***Penguin Kun-Wars*** is a simple yet surprisingly addictive game thanks in part to the aggressive -- some would argue downright nasty -- play of your computer opponents, who, by the way, laugh mercilessly whenever they hit you. Filthy animals!

JUST FOR QIX

By Michael Thomasson

This issue's arcade game of choice is none-other than the immensely popular side-scrolling beat-em up ***Double Dragon***. The initial game was released in 1987 by Technos in Japan, and licensed to Taito for manufacture and distribution in the United States and Europe. The original game concept, in addition to the character names, were loosely inspired by the Bruce Lee film, "*Enter the Dragon*."

Interestingly, when Taito released the game internationally, they altered the original Technos Japanese storyline. Since most reading this column reside outside of Japan, we'll focus on Taito's international ***Double Dragon*** releases.

Double Dragon

Martial arts masters and brothers Billy and Jimmy Lee attempt to rescue Billy's girlfriend Marian from abductors, the Shadow Warriors. The game was playable by two players simultaneously, and in addition to using martial arts moves, the heroes could use items found in their environment such as knives, whips, baseball bats, sticks of dynamite, boulders and oil drums. ***Double Dragon*** contained a shock ending that reveals that the leader of the Shadow Warriors, known as Big Boss Willy, was none other than Billy's own brother, Jimmy Lee. The final battle, if played cooperatively, pits both players against each other! The game was such a HUGE hit that when it was released on home consoles, the game box proudly stated, "You'll never have to stand in line to play ***Double Dragon*** again!"

Double Dragon II: The Revenge

The first ***Double Dragon*** game was such a big success that Technos and licensing partner Romstar released the first sequel in the growing franchise in the following year. Part two seems to completely ignore the surprise ending from the original, and both brothers are again a team seeking to offer street justice to the Shadow Warriors and their leader, the Shadow Boss. This time their mission isn't a rescue operation, as Billy's girlfriend Marian has been murdered and they are seeking, as the title implies, revenge.

While the first game had individual punch and kick buttons for executing attacks, ***The Revenge*** alters the control scheme and implements a "right attack" and "left attack" button scenario. The Lee brothers have expanded their martial arts moves and can now perform a devastating spin kick maneuver.

An interesting fact is that the yelling sound heard when a coin is inserted into the cabinet is a sound sample captured from the coin-op game ***Kung-Fu Master***.

Double Dragon III: The Rosetta Stone

Technos released the third game of the series in 1990, with a fundamentally different design approach both in game play and graphic style. Billy and Jimmy Lee meet Hiroku, an old and mysterious fortune teller, who challenges the brothers to travel across the globe in search of the Rosetta Stone, returning them to Egypt to battle with the "world's strongest enemy." The third chapter allows for three-player simultaneous cooperative play. The new supporting character is none other than Sonny from Technos' first coin-op release, *Tag Team Wrestling*. The control set-up from part two was abandoned, and ***The Rosetta Stone*** returns to the button scenario of the original ***Double Dragon***.

Interestingly, weapons cannot be taken from defeated enemies during game play like in the two preceding installments. Part three contains a shop in which weapons, special moves and even back-up support characters can be recruited for a price. The shopping does not require fictional money obtained during the game, but actual currency. That is correct, you must insert another coin to upgrade your status, making *The Rosetta Stone* much more expensive to play.

Double Dragon

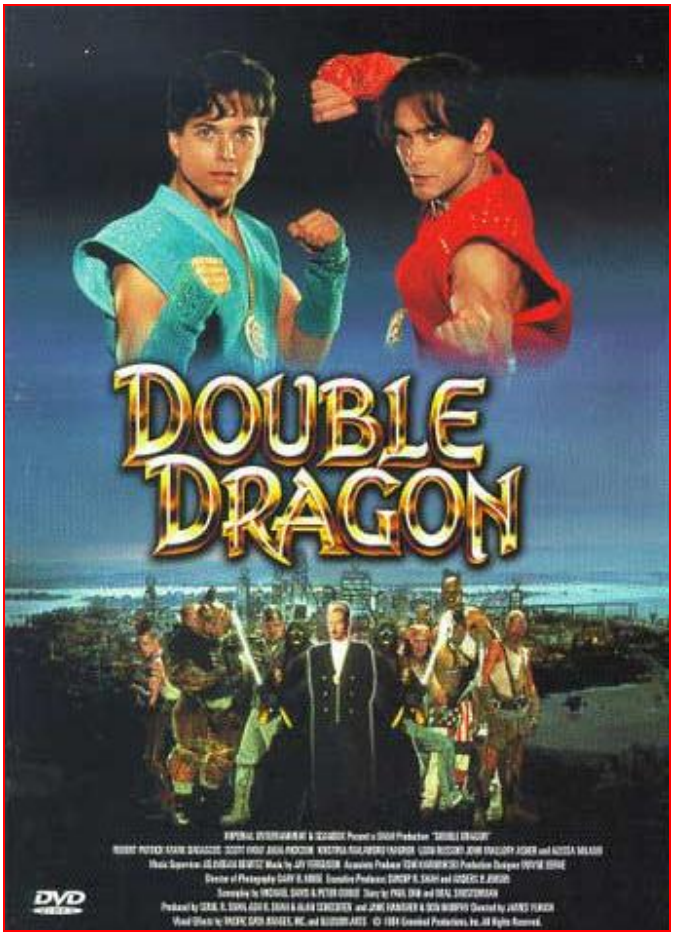
In March of 1995, the Neo-Geo system was graced with a new ***Double Dragon*** game with the same name as the original. Again titled simply as ***Double Dragon*****,** the game is loosely based on the 1994 movie, which was, in turn, based on the game series. It is no longer a side-scrolling beat-em up but is a one-on-one fighting game. It draws elements from the previous three ***Double Dragon*** arcade games and even references the fourth console-only ***Super***

Double Dragon, which was released on the Super Nintendo.

In this version of the game, the two brothers are drawn back to their old neighborhood in Bloody Town, a once peaceful city now ruled by violence. The story revolves around Koga Shuko and his quest for the Double Dragon medals.

Oddly, this game alters many of the characters from their original conceptual design. For instance, Marian, the weak and previously deceased damsel in distress, is now revived as a lethal combatant. Duke, formerly known outside of Japan as Big Boss Willy, has shaved his beard, abandoned his machine gun, and become a martial artist to be reckoned with!

If you look closely during the Cheng Fu stage, you can spot an original ***Double Dragon*** arcade cabinet situated in the large white boat in the background.



Rage of the Dragons

While not an officially licensed ***Double Dragon*** game, independent game manufacturer Evoga, in cooperation with publisher Playmore, released a sequel to the Neo-Geo ***Double Dragon*** fighting game in September of 2002. The game features the return of the two Lee brothers, Billy and Jimmy, and also the return of Abobo, who has been slightly renamed as Abubo.

If you can't get enough ***Double Dragon***, there are numerous ports of the coin-op games for over a dozen home console systems and classic computers. In addition to the arcade games, there were also original ***Double Dragon*** games that premiered and were only available on home consoles:

Super Double Dragon (1992)
Super Nintendo

The premiere console-specific ***Double Dragon*** title *was* ***Super Double Dragon*** for the Super Nintendo. This title featured a distinctive power meter feature that allowed players to charge up the power meter to perform power moves, such as the spinning jump kick, spinning back-fist, and the cyclone spin kick.

Battletoads and Double Dragon: The Ultimate Team (1993)
NES, Super Nintendo, Sega Genesis and Game Boy

The Battletoads' arch-nemesis, the Dark Queen, enlists the aid of the Shadow Boss and astonishes all do-gooders by launching out of the moon with an enormous spaceship, the Colossus. Billy and Jimmy Lee join forces with the ***Battletoads*** to battle classic enemies from both game series.

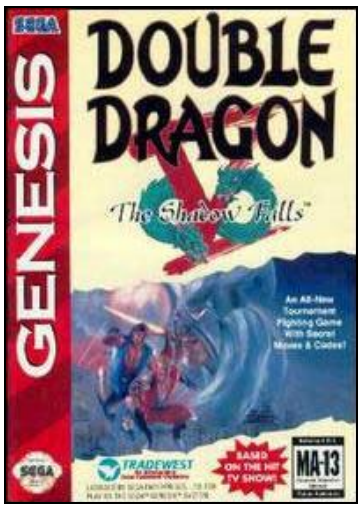
Double Dragon V: The Shadow Falls (1994)
Atari Jaguar, Sega Genesis and Super Nintendo

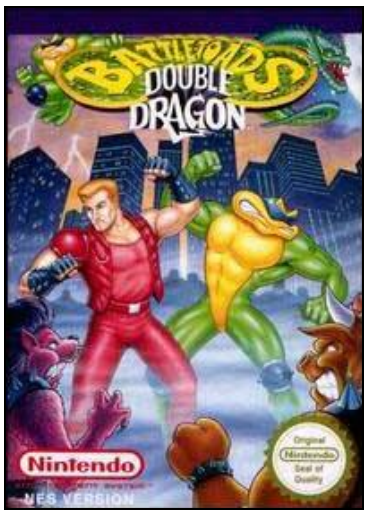
This dreadful entry into the series was inspired by the equally dreadful animated *Double Dragon* cartoon series. Billy runs a martial arts dojo with his brother Jimmy Lee, and does battle one-on-one with the enemy. This game is a fighting game similar to the Neo-Geo arcade ***Double Dragon,*** and not a side scrolling beat-em up.

Double Dragon Advance (2003)
GameBoy Advance

When Technos of Japan went bankrupt, Atlus purchased the rights to ***Double Dragon***. While this version is an update of the original 1987 ***Double Dragon*** game, Atlus added so much supplemental content, that it became its own game. Not only has this rendition been given a visual overhaul, but four additional levels have been introduced to double the amount of game levels. This title also borrows characters, scenarios and attack moves from ***Double Dragon II*** and ***Super Double Dragon***.

The Double Dragon legacy continues in other formats as well. The Lee brothers can be found on the silver screen, as an action figure line, on television as a Saturday morning cartoon, as a board game, on telephone calling cards, in handheld LCD games by Tiger Electronics, as part of a comic book series, on trading cards, in an audio soundtrack, on a beach towel, on iron-on patches, and more!





Professor NES

By Skyler Miller

Dragging yourself to class is a whole lot easier when that class is called "Game Development for the 8-bit NES." Taught during the Spring 2004 semester at Carnegie Mellon University (as part of a program that lets students teach other students), the class emphasized multiple elements of game design including programming, music, art, and even box design. (ROM hacks need not apply!) The mastermind behind the class was Bob Rost, 24, who holds a B.S. in Computer Science and a Masters in Entertainment Technology, and has development credits with Electronic Arts and Ritual Entertainment. Rost graciously agreed to answer a few questions for CGM about his teaching experience.

Classic Gamer Magazine: Besides just being a fun experience, what do you think the students took away from the class that they can use in a career, life, etc?

Bob Rost: Some of the students gave me specific feedback on this. I think that everyone gained a greater appreciation for the amount of work that goes into creating a video game for any system, and the complexity involved in humble little grey boxes sitting by the TV. I know that some artists learned more about how computers deal with graphics, and musicians learned a bit about digital music, and how it differs from the concert hall. I was surprised to hear from several computer science students that the class actually helped them to put together years of seemingly disconnected programming knowledge. Using the development tools I created for a low-powered system such as the NES, and understanding why I created them the way I did, allowed the students to begin to understand how modern computer science evolved. I was surprised to hear comments like this even from some of the Masters students. And of course, I hope the most important lesson everyone learned is that learning, research, and hard work can be really fun and rewarding in the right context.

CGM: It seems that you tried to emphasize that game design is more than just programming. How did the students without programming skills contribute to the experience?

BR: I make a huge distinction between game development and game design. One of my professors offers an excellent game design course at CMU, which I really enjoyed when I took it. But I tried to avoid reiterating everything taught in that class, so I only covered a few very specific areas of game design, such as 2D side-scroller game design, and some general NES-specific design tips. And of course I constantly reiterated the best game design advice ever: Less is more.

Simplify.
The class had a few students with no programming skills. Some of them dropped near the beginning, but a few decided to stick it out. The main problem that haunts computer scientists trying to make a game is often making it look and sound good, which is exactly why the game industry has the term "programmer art," to indicate artwork that looks like a 5-year-old made it while learning to use a mouse. So the actual musicians and artists in the class (and those who attended without credit) were actually able to add a lot. I also required that each group make a game manual along with the game, since I like to have final products be an entire experience. As you can tell from the class webpage, the manuals had varying results, due to some groups being blessed with pure artists, and others not so much.

I chose to allow non-programmers in the class because I've been in previous interdisciplinary classes and projects that turned out very well because everyone was an expert at something different. Looking at my previous game, ***Sack of Flour***, as an example, the quality of the music and the coherency of the artwork and color palettes are much better than I would have been able to do myself, even though I consider myself an accomplished musician and a decent artist.

CGM: What did you learn from teaching the class?

BR: I learned that I still enjoy teaching. I've tutored before and taught private music lessons for several years, but this was the first time I had taught a large lecture on a weekly basis. It was a lot of work, preparing the lecture slides, making sure everything I had was correct (it sometimes wasn't), and trying to keep it all interesting. But the most important thing I learned about myself is that I am a good teacher, and more people than just my mother have told me that now. I heard it from people not in the class, who talked to students, and I heard it occasionally from the students themselves, and I was very pleased when I consistently saw on the final course comment sheets that nearly every student said it was one of the best or most exciting classes he or she had taken so far.

CGM: What do you think was the best game to come out of the class?

BR: I'll let people judge that for themselves: http://bobrost.com/nes/games.php

CGM: What's your favorite NES game (and video game in general)?

BR: I've always been a big fan of ***Super Mario Bros. 2***, the one that everyone else hates. But recently, in the past year, I've been addicted to a few others, like ***Animal Crossing***, ***Super Monkey Ball***, and of course classic puzzle games like ***Tetris*** and ***Dr. Mario***.

Classic Sports Report:
Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!

By Scott Marriott

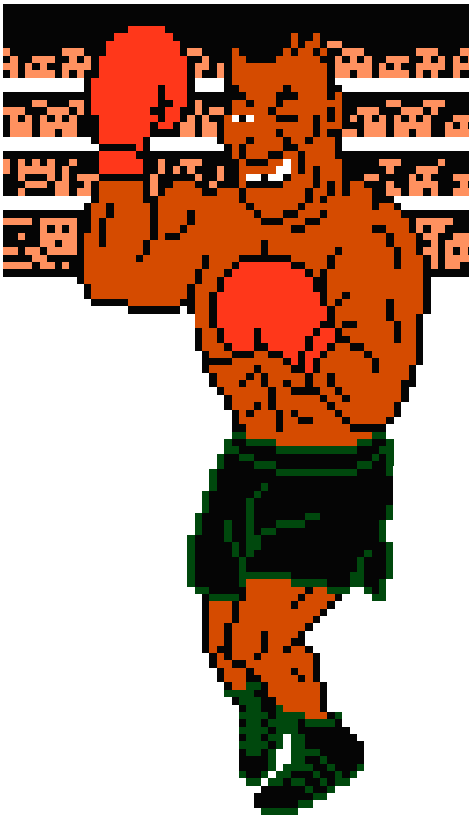
Before he was a convicted felon, before he chomped off Evander Holyfield's earlobe, and before he promised the press he would consume an opponent's children (presumably with a nice Chianti), Mike Tyson was congenial enough to be welcomed into the world of Nintendo. The publisher's first licensed athlete was an obvious choice in 1987: Tyson was an imposing, unstoppable force inside the ring, displaying a devastating combination of power and speed. It was never a question *if* Tyson would knock out his opponent, just how quickly it would occur. Nintendo signed the speech-challenged heavyweight to endorse its first NES boxing game, the home version of the ***Punch-Out!!*** arcade series.

The rare endorsement was prominently featured in a commercial, with Tyson sitting in a dark room before a wall filled with television sets. The camera was positioned behind the seated Tyson, with the boxer aggressively swaying from side to side as if desperately in need of a bathroom break. As Iron Mike rocked in his chair, action shots of the game's characters appeared on the wall of screens. Tyson concluded his fidgeting by spinning the chair around to face the viewer, revealing a rather sinister looking grin. "Now you're playing with power," the announcer said, as a low-pitched laugh bellowed out, ostensibly from the normally squeaky-voiced Tyson.

Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!! was released in October 1987, a month after another arcade boxing game hit the NES, Data East's ***Ring King***. Both titles

were colorful and action-packed, albeit with distinctly different approaches. What was striking about ***Punch-Out!!*** was its large, cartoon-like graphics -- hands down the best looking version of the sport up to that point. It also avoided the trap previous boxing games, including ***Ring King***, would fall into: rapid button tapping, with a little more rapid button tapping for good measure. ***Ring King*** and Activision's ***Boxing*** (1980) were certainly fine attempts, but each resembled electronic versions of Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots with the ability to move back and forth. They were physically tiring.

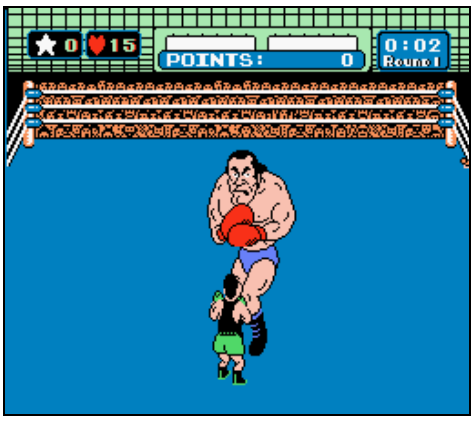
This is not the case with ***Punch-Out!!*** Non-stop button mashing will have you kissing canvas within seconds, and there is some quick thinking involved, though some may argue it's a pure reflex response. To its credit, ***Punch-Out!!*** solves one of the great problems in video game boxing by doing away

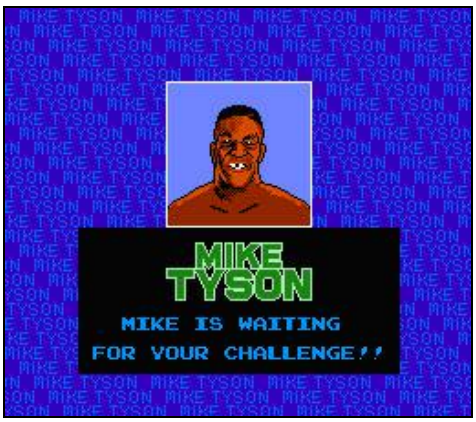


with movement inside the ring. The focus is simply on the one-on-one confrontation, the most exciting aspect, allowing players to throw multiple punch types (left or right body blows and jabs to the face), block, and evade.

Of course, for fans of the two arcade titles, a few concessions had to be made to deliver the game to the small screen.

The "biggest" difference is the protagonist, dubbed Little Mac, who is Lilliputian in size compared to his opponents. While this would normally be distracting, the equivalent of Emmanuel Lewis taking on Richard Moll in Fox Celebrity Boxing, the small size gives players an unobstructed view of each opponent's repertoire of moves. Each colorful boxer (some were pulled from 1984's





Punch-Out!! while others were lifted from 1985's arcade sequel) has his own quirky style and pattern, making ***Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*** less a boxing game in the traditional sense and more a series of boss fights, where you have to quickly identify visual cues and react by dodging to the left or right, blocking, or countering by punching low or high at the precise moment.

Don Flamenco, for example, unleashes a huge windup punch, raising his right arm straight into the air and then looping it around to knock you senseless. While each fight begins with a little preview animation of what to expect, and the trainer offers tips in between rounds, players are basically on their own. The object is to defeat a series of 13 opponents (ten original fighters and three rematches) until you reach the "dream match" against Tyson himself. Unlike previous boxing titles, players will spend as much time blocking or avoiding punches as they will swinging. A heart meter counts down with each missed punch or successful block, gradually tiring Little Mac out until he flashes red and momentarily loses his punching ability.

The oddball cast of characters includes such memorable palookas as Bald Bull, King Hippo, Von Keiser, and Soda Popinski, a family-friendly variant on the 1985 arcade game's Vodka Drunkenski. All of the fighters display fancy footwork, toothy grins, and shifty shoulders to keep you on your little toes. The clash in sizes adds to the whimsy – Little Mac literally jumps in the air to connect with jabs -- but once you get going you're only focused on your opponent. In this game at least, size doesn't matter. The gameplay is so well done, the graphics so vibrant and cartoon-like, and the control so responsive, that the only thing that matters is tuning up the mugs of would-be champions.

The action inside the ring consists of three rounds, with each round lasting three minutes, as players advance through -- surprise, surprise -- three circuits. What makes ***Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*** so engaging is the solid feeling of punches, with visual feedback in the form of sweat flying, eyes bulging, and mouths agape. Little animations such as flexing muscles, Tyson's telltale wink, or ridiculous taunts give this game a sense of personality that's rare in sports titles. It certainly doesn't hurt that, for those in need of venting pent-up aggressions, knocking out an opponent with a well-timed super punch is oh-so-satisfying, with an over-the-top animation that has the boxer reeling all the way to the back of the ring before stumbling to the canvas.

After the Mike Tyson license expired, Nintendo re-released ***Punch-Out!!*** in August 1990 with "Mr. Dream" as a replacement, who has an identical move set as Tyson. A sequel was released on the Super NES in 1994, which featured battery backup to save top knockout times and records, speech, and a transparent protagonist in the same spirit as the arcade original. Yet there's something about the NES game that remains as fun today as it was in the late 1980s. Perhaps it's the bouncy sound effects, the humorous animation, the opportunity to go mano-a-mano with Tyson himself, or the excitement one gets from rooting for the underdog. There's nothing quite like seeing the little man get his due, especially when you're the one controlling it.

To commemorate Nintendo Power's 100th issue, the editors ranked the top 100 games of all time from Nintendo systems. ***Punch-Out!!*** *ranked 31 out of 100. The only other NES sports game to rank higher was the original* ***Tecmo Bowl*** *at number 30.*

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Welcome to the Next Level:

The History of the Sega CD

By Scott Alan Marriott

The Sega CD was an interesting yet risky experiment by a company trying to build on its momentum at a critical time during the Genesis' life cycle. It was a ballsy move designed to not only trump competitors Nintendo and NEC, but to also address two key Genesis shortcomings in the process: limited cartridge space and inadequate sound.

Unfortunately, the restrictive color palette of the Genesis was still a problem, and to a lesser extent so was the number of onscreen sprites, though the Sega CD would attempt to offset these flaws by adding hardware effects such as scaling and rotation. At the time of the add-on's release, "multimedia" was the talk of the industry, with compact discs starting to replace floppies as the medium of choice. Would it render cartridges obsolete?

While NEC was first out of the gate with a CD add-on for the TurboGrafx-16, the Sega CD (released as the Mega CD in Japan on December 12, 1991) would differentiate itself in terms of speed, design, and — it was hoped — by strong third-party support. The $299.99 Sega CD launched in the States on October 16, 1992. The system fit snugly underneath the Genesis, with an arm plugging into the console's side expansion port, and it featured a front-loading motorized tray.

The Sega CD came bundled with the following five discs: ***Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective***, a game released a year prior on the TG-16 CD, a compilation disc of four unaltered Genesis games, two music sampler discs, one of which demonstrated the system's CD+G capability, and ***Sol-Feace***, a port of 1992's ***Sol-Deace*** enhanced with anime-style cut-scenes and a CD soundtrack. None were killer apps, of course, though the excitement and promise of the peripheral seemed to be enough to spark sales.

After a year on the market, the Sega CD was redesigned as a cheaper flip top model in late 1993 to fit alongside the company's second, sleeker version of the Genesis. By removing the expensive motorized tray and streamlining the design, Sega was able to drop the price and put themselves in a better market position when and if Nintendo went ahead with their proposed $199 CD-ROM drive developed by Sony. Of course, that never materialized, but Sega's lower price point ($229.99) and pack-in game (***Sewer Shark***) was expected to keep the system afloat.

The Sega CD also appeared in a few other guises to drum up appeal in different segments of the population. In April 1994, Sega shrunk the Sega CD and Genesis into a portable hybrid called the CDX (Mega Multi-X outside of the U.S.), released at the wallet-busting price of $399.99 with pack-in games ***Sonic CD***, ***Ecco: The Tides of Time***, and ***Sega Arcade Classics.*** An add-on module was also available for the high-end Pioneer LaserActive in late 1993, but interested Sega fans would have to pay a princely sum of $599.99 *in addition* to the laserdisc-based console itself, which retailed for a whopping $969.99.

Another all-in-one device debuted in September 1994, the strangely titled X'Eye (Wondermega in Japan) from JVC Musical Industries, a company that was "instrumental" in developing the Sega CD. The X'Eye was ostensibly aimed at the same upscale market as the Philips CD-i, and featured a custom designed sound chip and karaoke support along with an eclectic mix of bundled software: ***Prize Fighter***, ***Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia***, and a karaoke CD. At a price point of $499.99, however, the system hit a sour note with consumers.

At around 160 titles released in the States alone, it's hard to call the Sega CD an outright failure, but at the same time there are precious few must-have titles for those valuing quality over quantity. Sega simply had its thumbs in too many pies to adequately support all of its endeavors, and it seemed that whatever Sega's research and development team could cook up would be produced without considering how it would survive (Activator, Menacer, Sega 32X, Nomad, CDX, and so forth).

By trying to manage multiple product lines and diluting the market with several different platforms, Sega was in effect sabotaging its development resources and confusing its loyal fan base. When the books were closed on the Sega CD in 1995, the system had sold an estimated 1.5 million units, a number that represented only 10% of Genesis owners. While there are many reasons why the Sega CD didn't take off, the lack of quality software was its ultimate downfall.

Donkey Kong: A Decade Later

By Skyler Miller

Ten years ago this month, Nintendo released the simply titled ***Donkey Kong*** for the Game Boy. At the time, it didn't seem like much of a milestone, but it has since become the gold standard of how to update a classic game without losing the soul of the original.

The main reason ***Donkey Kong*** works so well is that it's not so much a remake as an extension of the 1981 arcade game. While the update contains all four levels of the original -- one of the few home versions to do so, in fact -- the big ape doesn't stay defeated for long. He grabs Pauline and continues his reign of terror, sending Mario on a brand new chase with 96 more levels.

Each level is a self-contained puzzle that requires Mario to find a key and carry it to the locked exit. Standing in your way are a variety of obstacles and enemies, and every so often, you'll face off against DK himself. A combination of timing, dexterity and strategy in order to be successful. Luckily, Mario also comes armed with some additional abilities over his Jumpman days, including doing handstand jumps, throwing objects and performing backflips. You're also able to save your progress at any time.

The visuals maintain a nice balance between referencing the arcade game and subtly updating the graphics to place them more in line with Mario's modern look (in 1994). ***Donkey Kong*** is also notable as being the flagship title for the Super Game Boy, a Super NES peripheral that allows you to play Game Boy games on your television with a limited color palette and a decorative border.

Above all, ***Donkey Kong*** offers a great bang for your buck. Not only do you get the full arcade game, but you're also treated to an entirely new adventure that offers hours of challenge and enjoyment. In contrast, put it side-by-side with Nintendo's more "modern" GBA release of ***Donkey Kong*** (part of the "NES Classics" series), which offers nothing more than a bare-bones emulation of the inferior NES version. And we call this progress? The only real drawback for modern players would be the game's lack of color, but don't let this stop you from experiencing one of Nintendo's finest. These days, classic compilations and remakes are commonplace, but few have been able to match the overall accomplishment of ***Donkey Kong***.

*Nintendo recently released **Mario vs. Donkey Kong** for the GBA, which is something of a successor to **Donkey Kong**. **Donkey Kong** itself can be found for anywhere from about $5 to $25 on eBay depending on its condition and whether or not it comes with a box and instructions.*

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Classic Import:

PULSEMAN

By Geoffrey Miller

Simply put, there's no reason ***Pulseman*** shouldn't have been released in America. This 1994 Mega Drive import (developed by future ***Pokemon*** designers Game Freak and published by Sega) has it all: beautiful graphics, inventive design, and intense action. Yet it remained only in Japan – an odd choice considering the Mega Drive was floundering in Japan while its North American counterpart, the Genesis, flourished. It's hard to understand why Sega of America skipped over this gem (although it's certainly not the only mistake they're guilty of). ***Pulseman*** would no doubt have been a huge hit if it had been brought across the Pacific.

It doesn't take more than a glance at the cover art to realize that ***Pulseman*** takes a generous amount of inspiration from

Mega Man. Pulseman himself could practically be Mega Man with a coat of red paint, and the main leader of the nefarious Galaxy Gang he fights bears more than a slight resemblance to Dr. Wily. Despite these superficial similarities, ***Pulseman*** doesn't really play very much like the long-running Capcom series. Pulseman doesn't gain the powers of his foes, nor does he blast enemies with a cannon built into his arm. Instead, his powers revolve around the use of electricity.

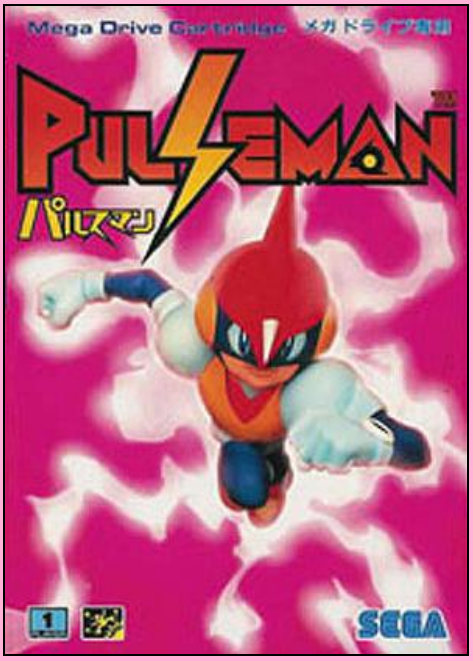
The most basic attack at your disposal in ***Pulseman*** is a close-range punch. Pulseman's outstretched arm, surging with electrical power, can take out most regular enemies with one tap of the B button. But store up a little electricity – running for a brief distance does the trick – and you'll have more options at your disposal. You can punch as you normally would with the added bonus of a charge shot of energy (great for taking out enemies from a distance); however, a more useful technique, the Volttecer, can be used with the A button. Think of the Volttecer as Sonic's patented Spin Dash, except Pulseman can go flying in any direction, bouncing off walls and taking out any enemy that comes in his path. A crouching kick and an occasionally useful Pele-esque bicycle kick (Up + Jump) round out Pulseman's repertoire.

Level design is fairly typical for 16-bit side-scrollers, with influence from Sonic's classic outings being evident. There isn't as strong an emphasis on speed as in Sonic, but you'll use Pulseman's Volttecer to go through elaborate mazes the same way Sonic's Spin Dash was used to go flying through loops. You'll even find yourself using the Volteccer in cool Breakout-style bonus stages (after every main stage). Don't forget to take your time and explore the levels – there are plenty of power-ups to nab, like a heart to repair energy (Pulseman can absorb three hits before he dies), a lightning bolt that keeps Pulseman in a perpetually charged state for an extended period, and Spark Balls (collect ten for a 1-Up plus a full energy repair).

If ***Pulseman***'s level design is relatively traditional, it certainly balances that out with its original art design. While there are several levels in realistic settings – like a Japanese city, a Las Vegas Casino, and an Australian coral reef – most levels take place in "cyberspace." See, one of Pulseman's abilities is to jack into computers or other electrical devices and enter a surreal virtual world. These areas are full of bright flashing lights and wild psychedelic effects (imagine the craziest rave ever). Just when you think you've seen everything, you'll find yourself in another creative and beautiful level. The

final stage -- a tribute to 80's arcades -- will put a smile on any classic gamer's face.

Of course, this level of artistic creativity also requires pushing the system's hardware to its limits, and ***Pulseman*** is a bonafide showcase of the true power of the Mega Drive. Layer upon layer of parallax scrolling, wonderful warping and distortion effects, and lush color are all on display. The sheer amount of colors on-screen is amazing; if you have a friend who's always complaining about the "crappy colors" of the Genesis, this is the game to show him. The aural component of the game is just as impressive. There's a fine mix of classic, upbeat platformer tunes and more experimental electronic beats (the strangest "virtual" levels tend to have the strangest music to match). You'll also find a wide variety of voices (all in English), including a few fully spoken newscasts. The voices do suffer from scratchy sound, but it's still a noteworthy feat.



There are a couple problems that knock ***Pulseman*** down a few notches. For one thing, there's an awful lot of slowdown. It doesn't affect the game too badly, although it's annoying at times. You'll also find that there's an abundance of 1-Ups to be found, perhaps a few too many. It's not a particularly challenging game, so you have

to wonder why Game Freak decided to provide such a superfluous amount of lives. But those are minor quibbles in the face of greatness. ***Pulseman*** is one of the best action/platformer games on Sega's 16-bit machine, and considering the high quality of the competition, that's no small feat.

Omake: *Most Japanese Mega Drive games only need some sort of pass-through converter, such as a Game Genie, to play properly on a US Genesis. Pulseman is one of a small amount of Mega Drive games with a special regional lockout chip. You can easily bypass this though. Just enter this code into your Game Genie before starting the game: LAXT-AA5L.*

Music Reviews

SONIC BOOM

No, it's not an ode to ***Street Fighter II***'s Guile, but rather a focused compilation of Sonic the Hedgehog melodies created by Spencer Nilsen, a music composer, arranger, and producer best known for his work on first-party Sega CD games. Yet Sonic Boom, which exclusively consists of ***Sonic CD*** tunes as well as selections from ***Sonic Spinball***, is more of a curiosity than something you'll want to listen to more than once.

The problem? The arrangements never feel like they belong in a video game, much less an upbeat, fast-paced Sonic title. Interestingly enough, the soundtrack for the U.S. version of Sonic CD was completely redone for American audiences, causing a stir in at least one mainstream game magazine, *Die Hard Gamefan*. Though not exactly known for its editorial restraint or even-keeled tone, the magazine was quick to criticize the revamped soundtrack in the January 1994 issue, knocking the game's final score down 20% on average from the Japanese version. This was unusual for the hype-crazy review crew, who tossed out 100% scores

on almost a monthly basis.

The editors' reaction in this case was not unfounded, however. The American soundtrack never detracts from the game, but it doesn't add anything meaningful to it, which is a shame because ***Sonic CD***'s unusual structure lends itself well to interesting arrangements. Since Sonic travels through time, each region features its own "good future" or "bad future" theme song, changing based on Sonic's performance. Yet the American tunes all suffer from repetitive blandness. The soundtrack drones on and on without any energy or sense of purpose, regardless of what's happening on the screen. It's almost depressing.

Looking back, the ***Sega CD*** seemed to be a workbench for Spencer Nilsen (a relative of Sega's marketing manager at the time, Al Nilsen) to experiment on. Sometimes his synthesizer-laden soundtracks worked (the peaceful, hypnotic ***Ecco the Dolphin*** soundtrack comes to mind) but most are uniformly forgettable. Released as a promotional tie-in for ***Sonic the Hedgehog 3***, ***Sonic Boom*** does feature one bright spot: ***Sonic CD***'s cheesy main theme, sung by a female trio named Pastiche, which is catchy in a Buckner/Garcia sort of way. Not much can be said about the rest of the music in ***Sonic Boom***, other than it never comes close to the red sneaker-tapping tunes in the original ***Sonic the Hedgehog***.

Smashing..... Live!!

Nintendo Power subscribers received a surprise in their January 2003 issue: an audio CD packed with 15 tracks from hit games on the NES, Super NES, Game Boy, and Nintendo 64. But this was no ordinary soundtrack compilation. The themes were all performed by the New Japan Philharmonic in a live concert held on August 27, 2002 in Tokyo. Specifically, it is a collection inspired by music found on the GameCube's ***Super Smash Bros. Melee***, which itself draws from many classic titles in Nintendo's storied history.

The orchestra gives new life to these songs, which are as iconic a selection as you'll likely find from a single publisher. Whether it's the light, breezy rendition of ***Super Mario Bros.,*** played with clarinets, the playful theme to ***Yoshi's Story***, minus the adorable, helium-filled chorus of Yoshis, or the bold, rousing theme from ***The Legend of Zelda***, you will be grinning from ear to ear, basking in the warm glow

of nostalgia.

If you've ever considered picking yourself off the sofa, grabbing a stick, running outdoors, and swinging at shrubs while screaming "Hee-ya!" at the top of your lungs, this music will inspire you to do just that -- or another game's equivalent. Also on disc are exuberant songs from ***Star Fox***, ***Super Mario 64***, ***Metroid***, ***Fire Emblem***, ***Pokémon***, ***Kirby's Dream Land/Super Star***, Rare's ***Donkey Kong Country***, which you can swing dance to, and the appropriately infectious theme to ***Dr. Mario***. The most surprising thing when listening is not how the orchestra gives emotional weight to the selection, nor is it the often bright, brassy, and brisk arrangement: rather, it's just how overlooked Nintendo's musicians are in evaluating a game's success. *Smashing…Live!* lets your ears know what your eyes have been enjoying for almost two decades.

-Scott Alan Marriott

On the Road to Pinball Pete's

By Chris Larson

One hour east to go, and the road was wide open - it was relaxing and nervous, like *Easy Rider* meets Gilda Radner. We were inching our way toward Ann Arbor, MI behind an endless racetrack of travelers, and trapped in our own thoughts. The mental confinement didn't last long. "I can NOT believe the new Meijer's logo," Jess sighed. Glancing at the truck we were passing, I noticed what was possibly the most nondescript "unique identifier" I've ever seen. And that would be the metaphor for the day. It was the most uniquely average day that you could have.

Jess Regan ("ManekiNeko" in the Digital Press forums), my wife and I ("larsoncc") were headed to a video game meet up in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The folks in the Atari Age and Digital Press forums decided that it would be a good idea to have everyone meet at a gigantic arcade called Pinball Pete's. The organizers, known to most as "Achika" and "Mr. Food Monster," rallied the troops in their respective forums, while I mostly watched from the sidelines.

For some reason, deciding to meet "Internet People" never comes easily for me. In the back of my mind, I was initially thinking of reasons why I shouldn't go. Meet-ups mean losing some of the anonymity associated with forum posting. Meet-ups can also have some strange results -- after all, most forums center around ONE common interest. Who knows what people are "really" like, right? And perhaps most importantly, you present yourself far differently in person than in a forum setting. As I thought over these concerns, I came to the conclusion they were nonsense. I really wanted to meet other gamers -- most people that I've met in Grand Rapids aren't passionate about games. Besides, the idea of going to a massive arcade was just too good to pass up. My wife and I announced that we'd be headed to the event, and I offered to give one of the forum members a lift, because I knew that his ride had fallen through just a day or two before.

So, before getting to an Arbor, we had to make a side stop in Ionia, where "ManekiNeko" lives. Ionia was a flooded disaster area. There were uprooted trees floating within a few feet of the road, and the whole place had an abused, forlorn look, like a cat fresh out of the shower. To force-feed the town some sunshine, Ionia declared that it was celebrating "Beer Drinking and Run-Down Rides Days" or something of that ilk. If the massive glob of pedestrians was any indication, it was a popular little event. It's my guess that Ionia ran out of Pabst Blue Ribbon that magical day. If you combine the convenience of main streets being closed, throngs of carnival fans (*shiver*), and the Swamp Thing preparing an all-out assault on the town, it's pretty easy to see why Jess wanted to get away for the day. We were about 45 minutes late when we finally stopped by Jess' apartment. We were back on the highway in just a few minutes.

I found it extremely easy to strike up a conversation with Jess while we were driving. You see, back in the early nineties, Jess was a fanzine editor -- and a hell of a cartoonist (still is). Writing fan magazines was something that I had done during that same stretch of time. That is, until the cost of college broke me of my nasty habits, like eating food worth more than three dollars, or writing about anything remotely interesting. It was nice to catch up with him and discuss what it was like creating a fanzine in the early nineties. I had brought a satchel of E3 goodies for Jess to peruse too. We talked about E3 quite a bit, which was fresh in my mind, because the show had ended just the week prior. Already, I could tell that this trip was worth taking -- I had been wanting to relate my experiences to someone that was interested.

After about an hour and a half more on the road, we entered Ann Arbor. From the highway, Ann Arbor looks deceptively small, filling the spaces between trees. Ann Arbor wasn't hidden from sight for very long -- after all, the town has a university with 40,000+ people attending. Our destination, Pinball Pete's, was easy to find. My wife was able to navigate the streets with ease, despite MapQuest's attempts to drive

us into the heart of construction. We did make one small mistake -- we missed the parking ramp completely, even though it was no more than a block away. We ended up parking along the side of the road at a meter, wondering if we'd have to feed it coins every hour or so.

Pinball Pete's is not your typical arcade -- it's bigger and better than the majority of arcades that I've been to in my lifetime. Pete's occupies the entire bottom floor of an indoor mini-mall. It's huge, yet tightly compact, with row upon row of games. Pinball Pete's has every game imaginable, from ***Tron*** to the latest ***Dance Dance Revolution***. They even had a four-player air hockey table with a double wide goal, for two defenders on each side of the table. Our little group met up with the larger group by the pinball machines (Pinball Pete's earns its name!). It was all the guys from Atari Age, including "WizDawg," "bjk7382," and "Tempest." Although our initial meet up was with five or six people, between fifteen and eighteen people showed up at Pinball Pete's. Here's a handy tip: when meeting with strangers, be sure you're easily identified. We wore video game themed
shirts -- geeky, but very effective.

Although it was a gaming event, playing games wasn't the most important part of the day. I played about an hour's worth of arcade games, opting to talk with the folks that had come to the event whenever possible. I did try to start up a ***Street Fighter Vs.*** Something Cool tournament, but Jess pretty much cleaned my clock, instantly. As it turns out, he's some kind of Zen master at this particular variation of Street Fighter, and it also turns out that this particular ***Street Fighter*** plays nothing like the Street Fighter that I remember. M. Bison was not nearly as handy as he should have been, and to do some of the basic moves, you had to throw in some extra joystick gyrations. Most folks gave up on the short-lived tournament. After a bit more time in the arcade, we decided it was time for the obligatory group photo. We crowded together near an ATM just above the arcade. My wife snapped a few shots for the people that brought their cameras.

During the group photo, an impromptu plan to go to an import shop cropped up. Although I could've spent the better part of the day in the arcade, I love Japanese import shops. Shops like that have weird candy, and weird candy is good. This particular shop was called WizzyWigs, and was on the other side of the main campus. The walk over proved to be a nice time, because we were able to meet and chat with the people that came to the event. WizzyWigs is a cool store -- if you find yourself in Ann Arbor, you should definitely head over there. It is large enough to have huge inventories of everything from DVDs to candy to posters to action figures. I ended up walking out of WizzyWigs with a bag full of Japanese goodies. I picked up a ***Legend of Zelda*** wall scroll (which is a poster in fabric form), and a whole bunch of Japanese candy and treats. My favorite was the wasabi covered peas. Hot stuff! The first taste of Japanese candy made us all realize that we were extraordinarily hungry. At this point, the group split up for dinner, and the group I was with headed back toward Pinball Pete's. We went to Panchero's, a smaller chain of burrito joints that really do it right. The burritos were gigantic. Thank heavens they opened a Panchero's in Grand Rapids.

At Panchero's I managed to put down my wall scroll for a whopping five seconds and lose it completely. I thought it was stolen, but Jess managed to convince the people behind the counter that they did indeed have my wall scroll and that I should have it back. I was grateful for his intervention, because I just assumed that one of the customers had walked away with it. As we were finishing our meals, those of us interested in trading games realized that we'd better get over to the parking ramp to begin our trades, before the day was through. I had brought along my entire arsenal of "garbage" to trade, as had a few others. I think that everyone there managed to get something out of their various trades worth keeping. I, for one, managed to get a boxed ColecoVision from "spoon" for the whopping price of "we'll talk about the specifics later." As of this writing, I have yet to figure out what I'm going to be able to dig up for the guy, but if I have to, I'll pay cash -- the system was well worth it.

The Ann Arbor meet up was worth going to. I'm glad that I didn't let my apprehensions about going get the better of me. I met some great people, had a great time, and made some great trades.

Games. Bond Games.

Just as creator Ian Fleming's books helped popularize espionage novels and romanticize the daring life of a spy, MGM's Bond films have created a visual impression that has managed to transcend the printed page and become part of pop culture. Though many actors have slipped into his tuxedo, sipped his shaken, not stirred, martinis, and squeezed the trigger of his Walther PPK, the singular identity of a suave, elegant, and impossibly fortunate secret agent has remained intact nearly 40 years after the first book hit the printing press.

Could there be a more perfect literary and film character to bring into the digital domain? James Bond should rank near the top of any credible list of action characters that would make successful video game heroes, as Bond carries with him an aura of unflappable coolness that makes him so uniquely appealing. So the question was never "should a James Bond game be made?" but rather "what can we have him do?" Capturing Bond's essence has been the challenge facing developers since the first 007 cartridge appeared on the Atari VCS.

Unlike the problems developers must wrestle with in creating a superhero game, possibly the most difficult genre to translate considering the potentially vast assortment of special powers under a player's control, James Bond's world seems easier to convey. It is, after all, grounded in reality, and Bond is an action hero proficient in hand-to-hand combat, weapons, and is blessed with an arsenal of "Q" gadgets for added excitement. Of course, vehicles are another key part of the franchise, not to mention voluptuous women, but it's the feeling of overcoming overwhelming odds with style and panache that's central to the Bond mystique.

What follows is a lineup of key Bond games that, in their own special way, attempt to transform the larger-than-life hero into an interactive medium. Obviously some do it better than others, and *Classic Gamer Magazine* will help you decide which games are worth your Moneypennies and which should be given the Goldfinger. So arch an eyebrow, dust off the tux, and hone your British accent as we get set to explore the world of Bond as envisioned by a rogue's gallery of developers and publishers over the years.

By Scott Alan Marriott

James Bond 007 (1983)
Developer: Parker Brothers
Publisher: Parker Brothers
Platforms: Atari VCS, ColecoVision, Atari 5200, C64

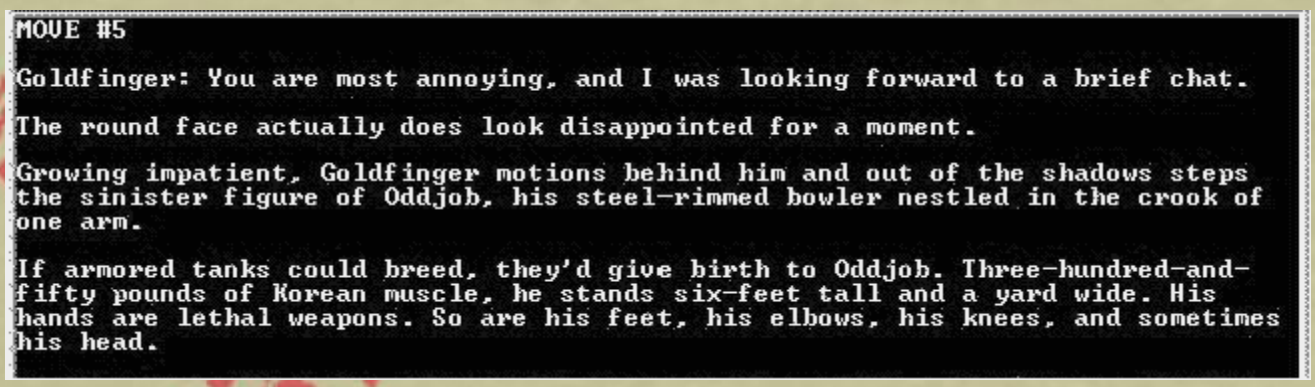
The usually on-target Parker Brothers misfired in their first and only Bond game, a vehicle shooter obviously inspired by ***Moon Patrol***, though not nearly as fun. While your car has the ability to jump over craters and to submerge underwater, the combat is surprisingly weak: you can only fire at 45 degree angles, and the helicopters and other threats harassing you each step of the way are invulnerable, which means you dodge more than shoot in this game. Another problem? If not for the static character likeness and snazzy theme song before each stage, you'd never know this was a "Bond" title. Parker Brothers earned a strong reputation of backing its high-profile licenses with quality gameplay, but in this case, its license should have been revoked.

A View to A Kill:
The Computer Game (1985)
Developer: Softstone Ltd.
Publisher: Domark Software, Ltd.
Platform: C64, Apple II

Perhaps we shouldn't expect much from a game based on a film starring a Metamucil-guzzling Roger Moore and the shrieking, ahem, acting of Ms. Tanya Roberts, but did it have to be so damn frustrating? A loose collection of three mini-games, ***A View to A Kill*** features time-sensitive missions that range from navigating a car through a maze to deactivating a bomb in a mineshaft. Problems include buggy glitches that force you to restart and imprecise control, making the thought of completing the game more frightening than Grace Jones after a cup of capuccino. The box art, some speech, and an impressive rendition of Duran Duran's theme song are the few bright spots in an otherwise slip-shod release. Not to be confused with ***James Bond 007: A View to A Kill***, also released in 1985, a text-based adventure game published by Mindscape.

James Bond 007: Goldfinger (1986)
Developer: Angelsoft, Inc.
Publisher: Mindscape, Inc.
Platform: PC

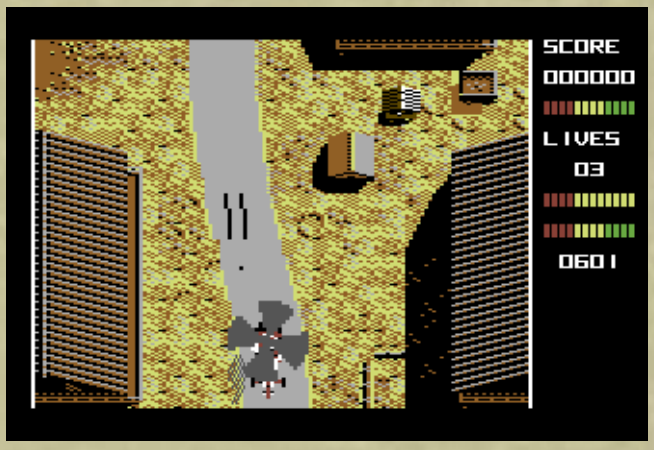
One of two text-based games released by developer Angelsoft, the other being a loose translation of *A View to A Kill*, ***Goldfinger*** is an involving, well-written adventure that closely follows the book and film's storyline. Unlike lesser titles in the genre, the writers didn't skimp out on the descriptive details, giving you a clear picture of your surroundings. The drawback? You better well have seen *Goldfinger* if you expect to get anywhere in the game, as many of the situations require you to react just like Sean Connery did in the film. Being James Bond is not nearly enough -- you have to *think* like him too.


MOVE #5
Goldfinger: You are most annoying, and I was looking forward to a brief chat.
The round face actually does look disappointed for a moment.
Growing impatient, Goldfinger motions behind him and out of the shadows steps the sinister figure of Oddjob, his steel-rimmed bowler nestled in the crook of one arm.
If armored tanks could breed, they'd give birth to Oddjob. Three-hundred-and-fifty pounds of Korean muscle, he stands six-feet tall and a yard wide. His hands are lethal weapons. So are his feet, his elbows, his knees, and sometimes his head.

James Bond 007 in The Living Daylights: The Computer Game *(1987)*
Developer: Sculptured Software, Inc.
Publisher: Melbourne House
Platform: C64

The Living Daylights proudly follows the 1980s tradition of Bond games being unnecessarily difficult to the point of hair-pulling madness. Players control a tuxedo-clad James Bond from a side-scrolling perspective as he runs, ducks, and shoots down enemies with his Walther PPK or other weapons designed by Q Labs. In an unusual design decision, players must aim a targeting cursor to pick off enemies in the background, who will suddenly appear from behind cover, fire at you, and then hide again like the yellow-bellied cowards they are. The game's eight levels are based on locales from the 14th Bond film, including Moscow, Tangiers, and the training mission in Gibraltar, but we suspect most would gladly lick Scaramanga's third nipple than attempt to tame such unwieldy controls.

License to Kill (1989)
Developer: Quixel
Publisher: Domark Software, Ltd.
Platforms: PC, Amiga, Atari ST, C64



Now *this* is more like it. ***Licence to Kill*** offers plenty of action-packed thrills in a diverse series of vertically scrolling stages reminiscent of arcade hits ***Commando***, ***Ikari Warriors***, ***Tiger-Heli***, and more. Players will pilot a helicopter, advance through a military base on foot (firing 360° to mow down soldiers), make their way across a moving plane, swim underwater, waterski behind a seaplane, and even drive an 18-wheeler in six stages that stir your blood, not shake your confidence. Not an easy game by any means, but one you won't mind revisiting for some good, old-fashioned arcade-style fun. One of the better examples of how to do an action-oriented James Bond game while still being faithful to the film.

James Bond: The Stealth Affair (1990)
Developer: Delphine Software
Publisher: Interplay
Platform: PC

Known simply as ***Operation Stealth*** overseas, this third-person adventure game was not originally conceived as a James Bond title, which is perhaps why it is so enjoyable. To be fair, the developers at Delphine Software were clearly inspired by James Bond when they created their protagonist, a sly, sarcastic chap (in a tux, of course) who must unravel an international mystery behind a missing American stealth plane. The game features an intuitive point-and-click interface (with commands Examine, Take, Inventory, Use, Operate, and Speak), colorful VGA graphics, and a sense of humor in the finest LucasArts tradition.

James Bond 007: The Duel (1992)
Developer: Domark Software, Ltd.
Publisher: Domark Software, Ltd.
Platform: Genesis

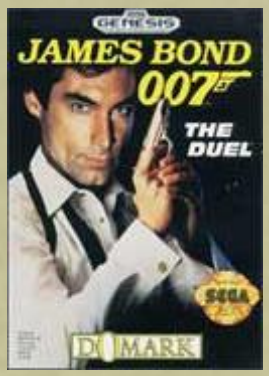
The first and only Bond game on Genesis, The Duel takes a few cues from Namco's ***Rolling Thunder*** series as you shoot your way past guards to rescue hostages, disarm bombs, and battle bosses from 007's storied past. The sharply dressed Bond can also perform a somersault jump, scale ladders, throw grenades, and in true ***Rolling Thunder*** fashion, duck into alcoves or doorways for cover. Unfortunately, the Duel is a solo affair only, and with a total of four missions, your time as a secret agent feels shorter than Nick Nack -- and not nearly as memorable.

GoldenEye 007 (1997)
Developer: Rare Ltd.
Publisher: Nintendo
Platform: Nintendo 64

Originally designed for the Super NES, British developer Rare's lone James Bond title for N64 is a showstopper, not only setting a new benchmark for movie licensed games, but also for multiplayer, artificial intelligence, and level design, which rewards smarts just as much as skill. Bond has to be selective with his shots, or the game will become more challenging as nearby soldiers rush to the noise. The three featured difficulty levels don't merely offer harder enemies, but completely new objectives: giving the game an entirely different feel for the second and third times through. Enemies are also unusual in how they go about their routines or patrols, batting flies out of boredom or even taking naps. If they spot you, they'll run to sound alarms or seek out cover to avoid getting hit. Location-specific damage gives the game another shot of realism, as do the death animations, even if the blood has been dialed down to appease Nintendo's sensibilities. Though there is noticeable slowdown in certain levels and the graphics are a little rough in some spots, the amount of playability offered through the competitive multiplayer mode and in unlocking cheats (they must be earned) kept the game near the top of the sales charts years after its release. In short, nobody does Bond better than ***GoldenEye***.

James Bond 007 (1998).
Developer: Saffire Corp.
Publisher: Nintendo
Platform: Game Boy

An unusual release for the normally quality-conscious Nintendo, ***James Bond 007*** is an ill-conceived game that suffers from an identity crisis. Played from an overhead perspective with short, squatty characters, ***James Bond 007*** doesn't know whether it should be an adventure or an action game. Unfortunately, it does neither particularly well. Whether it's completing silly scavenger hunts to acquire items or firing the equivalent of a peashooter at well-armed thugs, the game's 11 stages grow more tiring than thrilling. When the highlight of a Bond game is playing simple versions of baccarat, red dog, and blackjack, something is terribly wrong.



Tomorrow Never Dies (1999).
Developer: Black Ops Entertainment
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Platform: PlayStation

007's first appearance on PlayStation is an inauspicious one, thanks to an awkward third-person perspective that is more a hindrance than helpful. Bond cannot jump, dive, or crawl, making you wonder why the viewpoint was selected in the first place, other than to see your on-screen alter ego in a number of different costumes. The stages take place in various locales from the film, but the object in each is to basically shoot your way past hoards upon hoards of thugs. Notable features include a truly cinematic opening, complete with Sheryl Crow's theme song played to images of shadowy women, and a few levels where you get to ski and drive a car. Yet the game 's flaws, such as pop-up, clipping, and cheap enemies who always seem to know your location, ruin what should have been a red-carpet debut.

The World is Not Enough (2000).
Developer: Black Ops Entertainment,
Eurocom Entertainment Software
Publisher: EA GAMES
Platforms: PlayStation, N64

The World is Not Enough comes in two distinctly different guises, with the N64 version doing its best ***GoldenEye*** impersonation (though coming up short) and the PS version doing it best crappy game impersonation (and succeeding admirably). The reason for such dissimilar outcomes is a tale of two developers, Black Ops Entertainment on PlayStation and Eurocom on N64. The problems with the PS version are simple: slow-as-molasses gameplay, chunky graphics, and no multiplayer. The N64 version is an improvement over ***GoldenEye*** in terms of visuals (which support the Expansion Pak) and in the number of weapons and gadgets, but it offers fewer, considerably less involving levels and the multiplayer isn't nearly as addictive.

007 Racing (2000).
Developer: Eutechnyx Ltd.
Publisher: EA GAMES
Platform: PlayStation

007 Racing started out in the right gear, designed by a British developer experienced in racing titles, but the end-result grinds to a halt thanks to a combination of poor handling and irritating gameplay. While you will get to control a number of different cars, including several shiny BMWs and an Aston Martin, trying to aim weapons like machine guns or rockets without a lock-on cursor or crosshairs is an exercise in frustration. Instead of recreating classic Bond scenes, too many mission objectives involve collecting a series of items within a time limit. Those expecting relentless chases against ruthless enemies will be disappointed when they learn they are really part of Her Majesty's Secret Taxi Service. It's the touchy control that's the most damning flaw, however, making you wonder if the programmers were on an all-time high during development.

James Bond in Agent Under Fire (2001).
Developer: Electronic Arts
Publisher: EA GAMES
Platforms: PlayStation 2, GameCube, Xbox

Agent Under Fire, Electronic Arts' third Bond game, is the first to feature a storyline that isn't based on any particular movie. Ironically, the result feels more cinematic than in any other Bond game before it. The developers have combined first-person stages with free-roaming driving sequences and on-rails shooting segments that all fit together surprisingly well. It certainly helped that EA commissioned the ***Need for Speed*** crew to design the vehicle stages, which are good enough to build an entire game around. The downside to the experience is the overwhelming sense that you are in an extremely linear adventure, one in which you are being led by the lapels through short, compact levels. Great action moments, but the freedom, stealth, and multiplayer have been jettisoned like Hugo Drax on the *Moonraker*.

007: NightFire (2002).
Developer: Eurocom Entertainment Software
Publisher: EA GAMES
Platforms: PlayStation 2, GameCube, Xbox

007: NightFire is a modest improvement over ***Agent Under Fire***, offering new, exotic environments to explore within the same linear framework introduced by its predecessor. Only seven of the 12 levels are actual first-person shooter stages, gadgets seem more of an afterthought, and the difficulty level only influences the skill of enemies, not the number or type of objectives to complete. ***NightFire*** does add a multiplayer element, one that includes bots for solo gamers (four on PS2, six on Xbox and GameCube), and it is still an action-packed title that will hold your attention from start to finish. Yet it could and should be so much more, squandering its potential to cater to the popcorn crowd.

James Bond: Everything or Nothing (2003).
Developer: Electronic Arts
Publisher: EA GAMES
Platforms: PlayStation 2, GameCube, Xbox

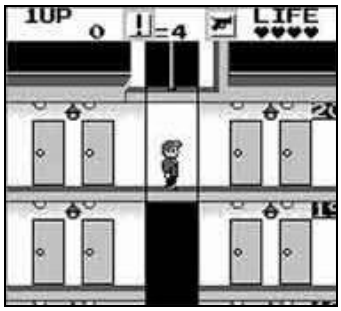
Everything or Nothing shows EA's love for big-name productions with a voice cast that includes Pierce Brosnan (a first in the series), Willem Dafoe, Shannon Elizabeth, and even Richard Kiel as Jaws. In a risky move, the game returns to the same third-person perspective that buried ***Tomorrow Never Dies,*** but with substantially better results. In fact, everything has been juiced up in this sequel, from the vehicles (a helicopter and motorcycle join a cloaking Vanquish and Porsche Cayenne Turbo) to nifty Q gadgets like a remote-controlled spider and a retractable rope for rappelling down shafts. Still, ***Everything or Nothing*** could use a little somethin' somethin', and that's a return to one specific genre, where the developers can focus their attention on better level design and more complex objectives. The co-op play and four-player arena modes make this the best Bond game from EA to date, but there is still room for improvement.

Elevator Action (Game Boy)

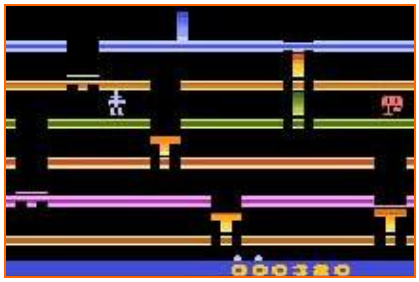
A dandy adaptation of Taito's cult-favorite coin-op, ***Elevator Action*** not only trumps the NES version in terms of audiovisual faithfulness to the source material, it also adds some more modern touches. The player's spy has several "lives," but he also has a life bar that measures how long that life is going to last. Smooth controls make it a joy to play, and this may well be this reviewer's favorite home version of Elevator Action, period.

--Earl Green

Rating:



Infiltrate (2600)



Rating:

Another weak offering from Apollo, ***Infiltrate*** has players working their way to the top of a building (via elevators) to obtain top secret documents while being pursued by assassins . Players must then return safely to the bottom of the screen in order to advance to the next level. The graphics of ***Infiltrate*** are laughable, featuring psychedelic color patterns and "assassins" who look more like McDonald's Fry Guys rather than cold-blooded killers. The gameplay itself isn't terribly bad, but also brings nothing new to the table. Control can be spotty at times, especially when trying to hitch a ride on an elevator, but the actual task of trying to navigate your way to the top does provide some challenge, especially in some of the more difficult game variations (including invisible assassins). ***Infiltrate*** is a mostly forgettable title in the VCS library, but is worth grabbing if only to check out the trippy graphics, as well as the guy on the box who looks like a very worried John Ritter.

--Chris Cavanaugh

No One Lives Forver (PS2)

Swingin' sixties secret agent Cate Archer graces the PlayStation 2 in an enhanced remake of 2000's critically acclaimed PC game. While the graphics and levels are a slight step backward from its computer counterpart, with minor slowdown, a drop in resolution, and more compact stages, PS2 owners can enjoy four new stealth-based sequences that explore Archer's shady past as a cat burglar. Fortunately, the console game is still packed with kitschy atmosphere and snappy humor, and it even surpasses the Bond franchise in the number of inventive gadgets to use, from lock picking barrettes to explosive lipstick. The spy genre has been done proud in this first-person shooter, with the requisite exotic locales, daring missions, and even a few driving sequences to boot. Highly recommended, or should we say, "smashing, baby."

--Scott Alan Marriott

Rating:

GEX 3 (N64)

GEX 3 may not be the most original 3D platform game out there, as the structure is nearly identical to ***Super Mario 64***, but what it does, it does with such high spirits that you can easily overlook the feelings of déjà vu. Each themed world seems more outlandish than the last, and the voice of GEX, comedian Dana Gould, flicks out droll one-liners without being annoying, probably because you're having such a good time scaling walls, riding animals, tail bouncing, slurping up flies, and trying to figure out how best to reach one of the level's remote controls. Once again the game is filled with pop-culture references, with locales ranging from a pirate ship to an army bunker, a winter wonderland, haunted mansion, and more. The spy genre is the prevailing theme, however, with GEX able to change into 25 costumes to save hottie Agent Xtra, played by former *Baywatch* babe Marliece Andrada.

--Scott Alan Marriott

Rating:

Golgo 13 (NES)

Rating:

Golgo 13: Top Secret Episode is an admirable attempt to blend together several gameplay types, but one that is hampered by flaws common to many earlier NES games. There are side-scrolling stages, shooting gallery-type levels, and first-person mazes, but each genre is handled poorly, with primitive animation and unresponsive controls. The mature storyline and use of cut-scenes are the best aspects of the game. Followed in 1990 by ***The Mafat Conspiracy***.

--Skyler Miller

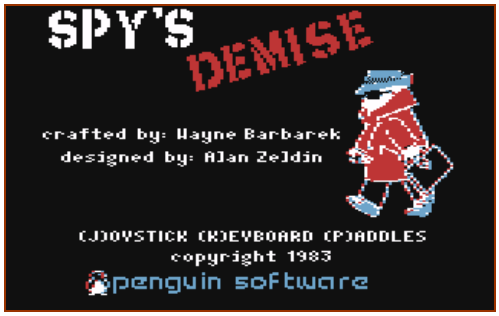
Spy Vs. Spy (C64)

Rating:

MAD Magazine's hot-tempered spies, one dressed in white, the other in black, bring their sneaky shenanigans to the computer screen in ***Spy vs.*** Spy for the Commodore 64. Played from a split-screen perspective, the game has both spies simultaneously searching different rooms to locate five randomly hidden pieces of "top secret" information. Once these items have been acquired, the spy must then race to an exit for a clean getaway. To stymie their rival's progress, players can place traps (springs, time bombs, buckets of water, and more) behind furniture, paintings, or attached to doors. Each trap can be neutralized, however, with items like scissors and umbrellas, so it pays to keep a close eye on your opponent at all times. When both spies enter the same room, they can try to club each other to death, with the loser suffering the same fate as springing a trap: restarting in a different room, stripped of all items. The light strategy, well-animated gags, and fast-paced two-player action make ***Spy vs. Spy*** one of the most memorable titles on the Commodore 64.

--Scott Alan Marriott

Spy's Demise (Apple II, C64)



Talk about your elevator action -- players in this game aren't trying to catch a lift, they're trying to avoid coming into contact with them! ***Spy's Demise*** runs players through a gamut of elevators that are deadly to the touch - they can catch the spy on their way up, or squish him on the way down. The object of this otherwise simple game is to reach the top of the screen as quickly as possible. Fun, but a bit repetitive.

--Earl Green

JAKKS Pacific TV Games

Boasting five titles in a self-contained joystick, Jakks Pacific's ***Namco TV Games*** provides a fun and alternative way to enjoy classic arcade action. Included in the compilation are ***Pac-Man***, ***Dig Dug***, ***Galaxian***, ***Rally-X***, and ***Bosconian***. After popping in two AA batteries (screwdriver required) and connecting the output cables to the TV, an easy-to-navigate interface gets you into the action quickly. However, be warned that this device is not using the original arcade code, so while each title's graphics translate well to the television screen, the sound effects are off, and original patterns will not work. Though the four-way directional joystick allows for surprisingly easy control (especially if you've only had the experience of playing these titles on MAME) it doesn't allow for diagonal movement, which is a major handicap in ***Bosconian***. The device itself is quite creative in design, yet not the most ergonomic -- the lower left corner tends to dig into your palm during heated chases in ***Rally-X***. Although not perfect, ***Namco TV Games'*** easy hook-up and mix of arcade titles makes it worth grabbing, particularly if you haven't had the pleasure of playing the somewhat obscure ***Bosconian***.

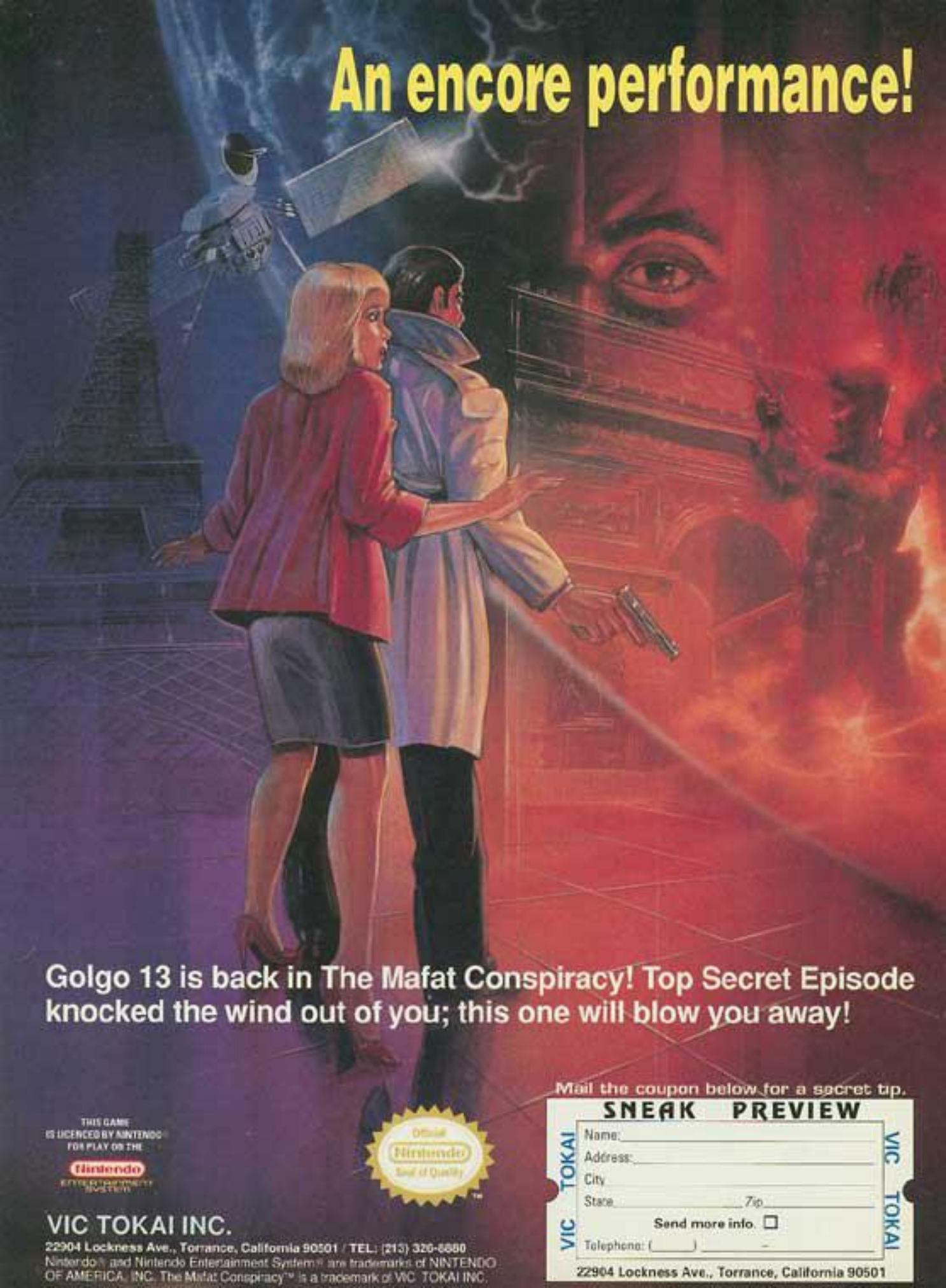
-- Chris Cavanaugh

Ten VCS titles, all housed in the iconic Atari joystick, can now be played hassle-free without dragging your console out of the closet. Like other Jakks Pacific TV Games, the battery powered ***Atari 10-in-One*** plugs directly into the audio-visual jacks on your TV. Included in the compilation are ***Gravitar***, ***Asteroids***, ***Real-Sports Volleyball***, ***Centipede***, ***Adventure***, ***Pong***, ***Missile Command***, ***Breakout***, ***Yars' Revenge*** (mislabeled as Yar's Revenge, slighting the entire Yars race), and ***Circus Atari***. The controller itself is responsive and even feels a bit sturdier than its forbear. The direct AV connection also makes the games look sharper than before, but perfect emulations they are not. While ***Adventure*** features the room where the "secret dot" is held, the layout of the maze within the black castle is different, and the game doesn't always place the bridge where it's obtainable. Another curious change is the secret room itself: instead of designer Warren Robinette's name, it shows an empty room with the word "text" in small letters at the top. Atari 10-in-One also makes the mistake of including paddle titles ***Pong***, ***Circus Atari***, and ***Breakout*** on a joystick compilation (Jakks plans to redeem itself with the upcoming release of ***Atari Paddle Games***). Those titles originally created for the joystick do play admirably, though the inability to daisy chain two controllers for competitive action is sorely missed. Casual gamers might not care about the changes, but purists will likely find ***Atari 10-in-One*** to be more a conversation piece than a pixel-perfect trip down memory lane.

-- Chris Cavanaugh

SpongeBob SquarePants will immediately appeal to kids on the merits of the controller alone, which features a wide-eyed, smiling SpongeBob's elongated nose as the joystick. Though the five included games are light enough to reel in those with short attention spans, none are as deep as SpongeBob's home in Bikini Bottom. The best of the bunch is a ***Breakout***-inspired puzzle game where kids aim SpongeBob left and right to bounce a bubble into a series of other colored bubbles. Unfortunately, the rest of the lineup isn't nearly as satisfying, with the overhead maze, side-scrolling shooter, and platform game feeling slow and stiff, partly because of the cute but rigid joystick. Kids already weaned on Game Boy Advance or PlayStation 2 will quickly tire of this collection, but those under seven will have fun, especially in front of grandma's television on those dreaded family outings.

-- Scott Alan Marriott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NINJA GAIDEN

By Scott Alan Marriott

The legendary Ryu Hayabusa is finally back to doing what he does best, that being a wall-jumping, star-throwing, sword-slashing, bat-killing, magic-conjuring überninja. It's the way it should be. By sparing Master Ryu from an unfulfilling life as a Dead or Alive combatant, Tecmo has resurrected an action series fans have been pining for since the halcyon days of the NES. Though Ninja Gaiden technically debuted in arcades, it's the 8-bit trilogy that remains (to this day) the best imagining of the franchise. Would the dramatic shift to 3D ultimately kill it?

Nintendo has proven that as long as you retain the essence of what made a title or series great to begin with, the change in perspective can be a blessing instead of a curse. It is a balance companies like Sega, Konami, Midway, and Namco are still struggling to achieve, and Tecmo has an even shorter a list of classic properties to experiment with. While the publisher has already ushered Rygar into the modern era with positive results, Ninja Gaiden has a much stronger pedigree. The camera, level design, enemies, and control had to be in top form to accommodate the game's delicate mix of combat and agility.

While Rygar had to be encouraging, Ninja Gaiden is a far more ambitious title from a control standpoint, and nailing Ryu's cat-like reflexes from within a 3D environment would be essential to its success. If you're going to do it, do it right. Otherwise you risk alienating a loyal fan base and sullying a potentially lucrative franchise in the process. And Tecmo, more specifically Team Ninja, has done it. Ninja Gaiden could have easily been a nightmare of close-up camera angles, sluggish moves, and confusing objectives, but it's nothing short of a dream for action fans. The 3D gamble has paid off handsomely, adding a number of new twists that steer the franchise in a new direction.

Interestingly enough, players are thrown right into the frying pan with nary a tutorial or practice stage to acclimated them to the controls. The first stage is set outdoors within a ravine, where players enjoy a brief moment of serenity near a gushing waterfall before leaping across precarious rock formations and scaling narrow ledges while making their way toward an enemy dojo that seems lifted from Enter the Dragon. The visuals are breathtaking, the camera is set at a comfortable length behind Ryu's back, but the star of this show is the control, with players able to perform a dizzying array of moves and counters.

At first it's just fun tapping on a button to slash at enemies, as Ryu ferociously slices and dices anything in his path, but this basic technique will have you lasting all of five seconds as the game progresses. The advance billing on Ninja Gaiden was that it was going to be difficult, as self-assured designer Tomonobu Itagaki reportedly wanted a game to satisfy his hardcore tastes. Of course, it's not like previous titles were a stroll on the beach, so this version fits in with what is historically a demanding franchise. Those who feel modern games, with their quick saves, custom difficulty, and frequent power-ups have caused old-school skill and technique to become atrophied will be pleasantly surprised with the unbridled intensity Ninja Gaiden dishes at players.

Gone are the traditional safety nets found in most recent action games, which means players must "earn" the right to record progress by finding save points, represented by statues, which are few and far between. To conserve precious health, players need to block (by squeezing the left shoulder trigger), jump, somersault, throw projectiles, and use every part of the environment to their advantage. This is essential – using walls, rocks, and other structures is a must to keep the coordinated attacks of enemies from turning Ryu into the ninja equivalent of a fillet o' fish. Fortunately for action junkies, the character moves at a blistering sense of speed. Sorry Sega, and all apologies to a plucky blue hedgehog, but this must be the definition of "blast processing."

While the action unfolds from a perspective behind Ryu, players can switch to a first-person view at any time to survey their surroundings or to use certain projectile weapons. For some reason the camera isn't as confining as it should be, perhaps due to the sheer speed at which the lead character moves. Pressing the jump button has Ryu leaping high into the air as if springs were on his boots, more than making up for the omitted double jump. He can also scamper alongside walls like Neo or Trinity from The Matrix, flip off any flat surface and perform a devastating slash, swing from branches, roll along the ground, summon magic, run on water, swim, and unleash weapon-specific strikes that are sure to turn heads – right before they topple to the ground.

There's also the trademark wall spring jump used to scale narrow passageways, one of the most satisfying maneuvers ever designed in a platform game, though it's sadly not as prevalent as it was in the NES trilogy. This game is all about combat, with a smattering of Resident Evil-type puzzles (insert object B into slot A), and a few devious traps to navigate. The environments (graveyards, underground sewers, villages, and more) are exotic and feature a mix of ancient architecture, but the 16 levels don't offer much in the way of exploration or interaction. Levels are designed more for forward progress along delineated routes, though there are plenty of hidden items to increase Ryu's life meter, add new moves, or to unlock all three Ninja Gaiden NES games in emulated form.

It won't be easy, however. The AI is

challenging in this game, meaning you should expect routine thugs to block and parry while their frisky friends provide cover fire in the form of energy blasts, arrows, or in some cases, riders on horseback. Most of the enemies are ninja variants for traditional steel-on-steel battles, but players will eventually encounter supernatural foes in the form of zombies and fiends as well as some of the nastiest bosses yet witnessed on the Xbox. You'll encounter a dominatrix type, a creepy mass of tentacles, a helicopter, and more. With all of the action that goes on in combat, there will be some issues with the camera, which cannot be manually controlled.

The lightning-quick response time of controls helps make up for the inability for players to manually swing the camera in the heat of combat (pressing a button automatically centers the camera behind Ryu, but there will be times when you are fighting blind as enemies attack Ryu from the back). You have to keep running, flipping, and slashing -- so chances are you'll be able to right some of the camera wrongs simply by taking an aggressive approach to combat. As in games like Onimusha or Devil May Cry, killing enemies proficiently will unleash glowing essence used to replenish magic power, health, or wealth. Thus how you fight ultimately affects how long you fight.

Keeping things interesting is the new ability to acquire a rather diverse selection of weapons, including nunchaku, a hefty war hammer, the boomerang-like windmill shuriken, and other tools of the trade, each of which can be powered-up to new levels at hidden shops located within the game. The weapons dramatically change each fight, so if you're having difficulty dealing with certain enemies with the default Dragon Sword, a new death-dealing instrument might help turn the tide in your favor. Also of assistance are health potions available at the same shops (for a small fee, of course) along with other types of elixirs.

Ninja Gaiden is nicely paced, a title that doesn't go too heavy in exploration, but also doesn't bore you with nonstop fights. You'll be interested in gawking at the varied and exotic locales, searching for locked chests needed to boost your stats, and solving basic puzzles. Yet there's always a constant fear that the next room might be your last -- whether it's from a trap or a group of enemies lying in wait. The only major complaint is you are at the mercy of the camera in this game, and there will be times when you'll clench your teeth in frustration as an enemy slices you from behind while you are engaged with another foe. Thankfully the variety of moves means repeating levels is not as irritating as it could have been. No stage plays exactly the same way twice, since you'll always be striving to perfect your technique.

Ninja Gaiden could have been a disaster. The lead designer has -- on record, no less -- admitted to not playing the NES trilogy, which means familiar story elements and supporting characters were scrapped in favor of new blood, and the many delays in development were not encouraging. Yet the final result "feels" like Ninja Gaiden. Few modern titles deliver the total package of thrills, graphics, and challenge, which fits in line with what the classic Tecmo series helped establish to begin with. Hardcore fans will yearn for more nods to the past, and the world here is so gorgeous you can't help but wish for more adventure elements, but this is unabashedly an action game from start to bloody finish. Free from the sneaking around that's associated with the genre, Ninja Gaiden is non-stop activity with a clean bill of stealth.

Rating:

Two Screens Are Better Than One?

Nintendo releases a handheld game featuring two screens, a folding clamshell design, and a d-pad. The year? 1982. The system? Game & Watch.

When the first photos of the Nintendo DS surfaced in May, many a classic gamer couldn't help but chuckle at its visual similarity to a system two decades its predecessor. Nintendo's long-standing love affair with dual screens was finally back in the open.

Only a few of the Game & Watch series used two screens, but 1982's ***Donkey Kong*** is also notable for being the first appearance of the cross-shaped 'd-pad,' which would become a staple on just about every controller since.

Nintendo also used the two-screen vertical orientation in ***Punch-Out!!***, ***Super-Punch Out!!***, ***Arm Wrestling*** and in their ***Playchoice*** arcade cabinets. But then it strangely went into hiding until the announcement of the DS.

Obviously, the Nintendo DS is much more than just a modern-day Game & Watch. With a powerful processor, touch pad, voice recognition and wireless gameplay, it has the potential to host some great games. But while they're at it, what's stopping Nintendo from introducing some other "innovative" products? How about a massive bazooka with six games? A ***Rad Racer*** remake complete with 3D glasses? Or a Power Glove for a whole new generation? And we all know it's about time for a big R.O.B. comeback.

--Skyler Miller

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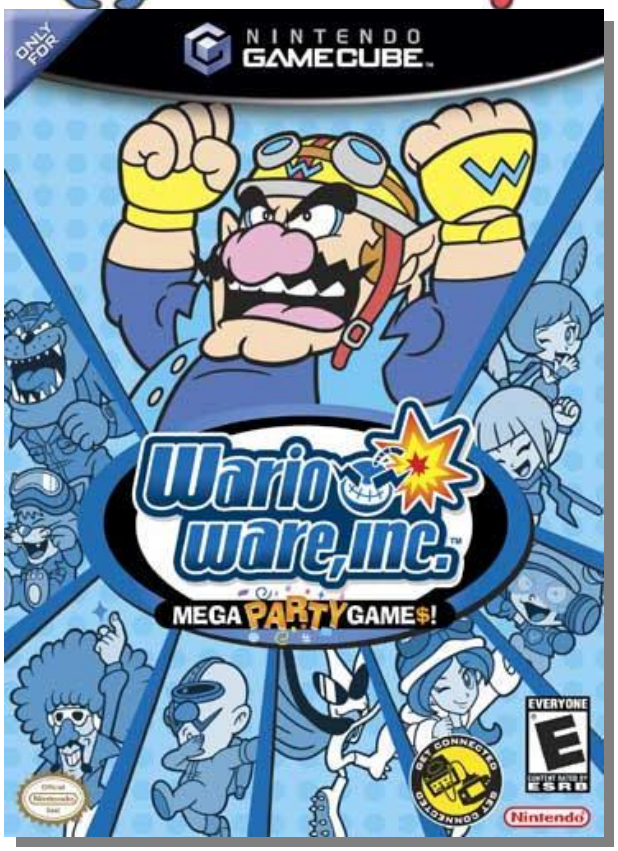

NINTENDO PLAYS PARTY POOPER

By Scott Alan Marriott

After wowing many a classic gamer with his mad-cap ménage of microgames, Wario and company are back for more fast-paced, reflex-oriented twitch tests. Or is he? Known best as a cranky moneygrubber, Wario's penny-pinching ways have seemed to rub off on Nintendo for this GameCube tie-in, a slapdash release that offers surprisingly little substance for fans of the handheld game. As a multiplayer experience, ***Mega Party Game$*** never approaches the cooperative craziness found in the ***Mario Party*** series, probably because the developers were not given enough time to customize the gameplay. Instead, the team did the best they could under the circumstances, shoehorning a multiplayer element onto a game designed first and foremost as an autonomous activity.

The first surprise is that none of the original's games have been retooled for the big screen. What you are getting for your powerful GameCube is a shiny disc that functions almost identically to the comparatively limited cartridge. There are even GBA-style borders around each microgame, so those who already own the handheld version may feel slighted. The good news is that all 213 games are intact and are just as playable as ever. The microgames, so-named because they offer mere seconds of gameplay, have you instantly reacting to new and different play styles culled from years of classic gaming history, including Nintendo's own past, from the Game & Watch LCD games to the ill-fated Virtual Boy.

The single-player game is nearly identical to the handheld version with a more direct approach, jettisoning the smaller game's cut-scenes in favor of cutting straight to the chase. The number of games a player has to complete in order to advance to the next theme (six in all, including sports, sci-fi, nature, and more) has been upped to 25, so players will get to experience more of the zaniness, which is a good thing. One interesting addition is stat tracking, which monitors how quick and successful you are at playing the games, but alas none of the bonus titles featured on the handheld, including the ***Dr. Mario*** variant, "Dr. Wario" has made the cut. Is it because Nintendo plans on releasing ***Dr. Mario*** separately as part of its "Classic NES" lineup on Game Boy Advance? Somewhere, greedy Wario is no doubt yelling "Ehhh-xcellent!"

Of course, this GameCube version is all about the multiplayer aspect. So perhaps we can cut Nintendo some slack for taking a shortcut and dumping the handheld game on disc. And we would — if the multiplayer games didn't feel so lame. The approach to multiplayer feels like something you probably did as a bored kid: trying to create a new game based on existing parts or pieces of already existing games. Chances are, it didn't work out that great,

and that's the problem with ***Mega Party Game$.*** All eight of the microgames are designed around the same idea: players taking turns at the GBA game. Only a few multiplayer games offer an experience that feels different.

In keeping with the format of the handheld game, each multiplayer title is hosted by one of Wario's colorful cronies. Survival Fever has disco-loving Jimmy hosting a party that involves two to four players (and their characters) dancing atop a stage. A spotlight moves from character to character, and whomever it falls on must complete a random microgame to excite the crowd. If the spotlight lands on everyone, a simultaneous game ensues — but alas, it's simply a microgame played on a split screen. Ho-hum. The second game, Outta My Way, might be the dumbest out of an underachieving lot. Players choose an extremely large character and attempt to block the active player's screen, effectively undermining his or her chances at success. (You can also play this type of "game" on your GBA if someone nearby is kind enough to put a thumb over your screen.) The opposite of this multiplayer game is "All for One," where players aim spotlights at the screen to *assist* the player in completing the microgame. It's entertaining for all for one minute.

The rest of the games add similar wrinkles to the standard solo action. Balloon Bang is a form of hot potato or musical chairs where players rapidly tap buttons to inflate a balloon while taking turns passing the controller after completing a microgame. The object is to avoid playing a microgame when the balloon pops. "Listen to the Doctor" is a variant on Simon Says, with a shaky, apparently crack-addled 3D doctor telling players to complete a microgame while doing things like puffing out their cheeks. Seriously. The other players "judge" the activity by having their onscreen characters clap in between rounds (by rapidly tapping the button).

The multiplayer game "e-Reader Cards" has the microgames appearing on decks of cards, which determine the number and types of games players must compete in as they take turns flipping them over. The game does not, however, include support for the actual e-Reader peripheral. Wobbly Bobbly actually has a few original multiplayer games played on the same screen, from stopping an alarm clock to grabbing a floating dollar bill, with each loss forcing a player's onscreen character to balance on top of an increasing number of turtle shells. Milky Way Delirium is an intergalactic twist on Othello (completing a microgame earns you control of an asteroid), but there are no standard board games a la ***Mario Party***, which might have made things a bit more interesting.

If these multiplayer games sound a little silly, they are. They are fun to play once or twice, but quite honestly, none are worth forking over an additional 30 clams if you have the GBA game. In fact, the handheld version is still the best way to experience the microgames, since you can take the fast-action on the road and won't be losing anything in terms of visuals or sound. Nintendo is finally realizing that third-party publishers aren't going to help them drive console sales, so they are doing what would have been unthinkable during the heyday of the NES — churning out properties based off recognizable characters as quickly as possible. In the case of ***Mega Party Game$,*** the company has taken multiple bites out of the same apple and seems content in passing it off as fresh fruit.

Rating:

Karaoke Revolution

By Scott Alan Marriott

Konami's ongoing Bemani series (short for the company's first interactive music game, ***Beatmania***) has proven that rhythm-based games are more than the flavor of the month. Yet their overall appeal caters more to Japanese tastes than the American palate, especially when peripherals are added into the mix. Only ***Dance Dance Revolution***, with its Power Pad-like floor mat, has created a buzz-worthy following here in the States, as other companies are left trying to woo fans with quirky variants like ***Samba de Amigo***, the upcoming ***Donkey Konga***, and the oddly compelling ***Amplitude***. It is a genre on the brink of busting out of its niche and bursting into the mainstream. Konami, along with U.S. developer Harmonix, may have done just that with ***Karaoke Revolution***.

Even before a single copy hits the shelf, ***Karaoke Revolution*** has the advantage of instant recognition: you have, willingly or not, experienced karaoke in one form or another at some point in your life. And a little show called *American Idol* is scorching up the ratings charts, teaching ordinary folks the dangerous lesson that if William Hung can find success at murdering songs, maybe you can too. Also in the game's favor is the cruel reality that plastic guitars, turntables, maracas, and drum kits required in other titles are too much of an added expense to reel in the casual gamer—the demographic most likely to embrace music titles to begin with. By bundling an accessory that can be used for multiple games, Konami has cleared one giant hurdle that has stigmatized the genre.

Available with a Logitech USB headset or as a standalone purchase, ***Karaoke Revolution*** earns kudos for not being packaged in a box the size of Rhode Island, meaning it can be tucked safely inside a bag for those fearing dire repercussions from friends or significant others. Unlike unfurling a large dance mat on the floor or wiggling a pair of maracas, players won't look silly donning the headset microphone. Well, not *that* silly anyway. The microphone can, after all, be used for Electronic Arts' online games as well as Sony's ***SOCOM*** and other hits, so the accessory won't be gathering dust in a closet. It also works on PCs and as an integral part of your very own *NSYNC/Backstreet Boys/Britney Spears/McDonald's drive-thru clerk Halloween costume.

Most would agree the voice is as much an instrument as a guitar, piano, or violin (in Fran Drescher's case, an instrument of destruction), but who would have thought it could be a joystick as well? Previous voice-activated games like ***Seaman*** and ***Hey You, Pikachu!*** involved coaxing a character to initiate actions instead of directly controlling the activity yourself. ***Karaoke Revolution*** has you as a singer and conductor, guiding the on-screen content using nothing but the pitch of your voice. Instead of a character, you control an arrow, which rises and falls according to how you sing. If you want to move the arrow up, you simply sing higher, and vice versa. Even if your last time reading notes was in high school study hall, you will be able to learn a song's proper pitch simply by watching the on-screen feedback. The game may even improve your vocal ability.

In addition to controlling pitch—and you Barry Whites or Michael Jacksons out there can still sing the song "correctly" in a lower or higher octave—players must breathe correctly so notes are hit at the proper time and for the proper length. This aspect follows the standard formula for rhythm games, where points are earned for precise timing. The object here is to sing the word, as it scrolls from right to left across the screen, at the moment it crosses a vertical line. So you only have three things to worry about in any given song: singing in the right pitch, using your voice to move a cursor up and down while

trying to match each song's note (depicted by a series of dashes of varying height and length), and hitting each note at the right time. The on-screen interface is so helpful that even if you turn the volume completely off, you can still get an excellent score just by watching the screen and making the right vocal adjustments.

Though ***Karaoke Revolution***'s voice recognition software is the best yet seen (err, heard), it's not perfect. The game does not recognize *what* you sing, just the pitch and how long notes are held. So if you are having problems with REM's "It's the End of the World as We Know It," and you will, you can fudge the lyrics by singing "badda bop, badda bop, badda bop" over and over again to match the rhythm. Thus the words to Weird Al's "Like a Surgeon" will do just fine if you're sick of "Like a Virgin." Men having problems with a song's range can pull a Tiny Tim and go falsetto with startlingly good results. What passes for excellence in the game does not necessarily translate to the real world, as you'll quickly find out from the snickers and chortles of your soon-to-be former friends.

A game like ***Karaoke Revolution*** lives and dies by the quality of included songs, and the developers have culled together an incredible 36 hits, more than three times the number of songs featured in a typical karaoke CD. While none of the original artists actually sing the included songs, the 17 hired vocalists are all of professional caliber. In some cases, you may even prefer their renditions of the songs. Classic gamers in particular will appreciate the extra attention spent on the greatest period of music ever created, the 1980s of course, with the inclusion of Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean," Pat Benatar's "Hit Me With Your Best Shot," Cyndi Lauper's "Girls Just Want to Have Fun," New Order's "Bizarre Love Triangle," and more, representing approximately one-third of the total song list [see sidebar].

There are only three main modes of play, but what's featured is fun, addictive, and easily worth the price of admission if you want to convince a spouse, significant other, roommate, or group of non-gaming friends the benefits of PlayStation 2. In addition to straightforward karaoke, which lets players sing to their hearts' content without worrying about a score, are arcade and showtime modes. The latter is the heart of the game, where players select an alter ego and perform their choice of four songs in each 3D venue (eight in total, from a house party to a sports stadium). If players rack up a certain score, wowing the audience in the process, they'll advance to a new venue and select from a more complicated group of songs (each is rated from one to three in complexity).

Like the developer's previous music game, ***Amplitude***, the replay incentive in ***Karaoke Revolution*** is tied to unlockable characters and outfits, which to be honest, are not exactly inspiring (the hidden videos of "normal" people singing the songs are a hoot, however). The cartoon-like characters, with big heads and sinewy bodies, look like something that could have been done on the original PlayStation (think ***Bust-A-Groove***) and all lip sync to the correct words even if you flub a line or deliberately change the lyrics. You can't make the characters dance or move, and customization is limited to choosing an outfit. Hopefully future installments will do something a little more meaningful, such as incorporating a create-singer mode, the option to purchase individual items such as tattoos, jewelry, or clothing, and so forth. Why not add a career mode where players can earn recording contracts or corporate sponsorships?

These are minor complaints, though, because the core game is excellent. Harmonix continues to surprise with its PlayStation 2 lineup, and Konami was wise to enlist their talents. Though you may have been blessed with a tin ear in lieu of golden pipes, you will have fun playing this game, with or without a group of people and whether you're soused, stewed, or stone cold sober. Since the developers understood the golden rule of karaoke (*not everyone who sings can actually sing*), they included some forgiving difficulty settings as well as an option to reduce the microphone output for shy types who prefer a more soft-spoken approach. To quote *American Idol* judge Simon Cowell, Harmonix has "raised the bar" with ***Karaoke Revolution*** in terms of accessibility, peripheral use, and overall enjoyment. And you haven't lived until you see a friend, family member, or loved one try to sing the impossibly high ending to Mr. Mister's "Broken Wings." Broken, indeed!

Rating:

Addicted
All You Wanted
Are You Happy Now?
Believe
Billie Jean
Bizarre Love Triangle
Broken Wings
Celebration
Chain of Fools
Complicated
Crawling in the Dark
Don't Know Why
Every Morning
Everything You Want
Girls Just Want to Have Fun
Hey Jealousy
Hit Me With Your Best Shot
How You Remind Me
I'm Coming Out
It's the End of the World As We Know It
Kiss Me
*Ladies Night**
Like a Virgin
*One Week**
Red, Red Wine
Save Tonight
*Science Genius Girl**
She Talks to Angels
*Smooth Criminal**
Son of a Preacher Man
The Power of Love
Waiting for Tonight
When a Man Loves a Woman
Wind Beneath My Wings
You Really Got Me
You're The One That I Want

**unlockable*

Gods And Monsters
Age of Mythology: The Titans

by Mark Hoogland

Expansion packs are notorious for providing minimal additional content at a premium price. ***Age of Mythology: The Titans*** is a glorious exception. There's plenty of new content -- a whole new single-player campaign, a new civilization (The Atlanteans) and adjusted gameplay for the original three civilizations. ***Starcraft***, ***AoM's*** three-civilization-predecessor, never attempted to add a fourth regime, with good reason: the balancing necessary for three distinct civs is formidable. It's surprising that Ensemble Studios was willing to undertake such a gargantuan task, and commendable that they released such a polished product. ***Age of Mythology*** fans will find that ***AoM: The Titans*** adds a new layer of depth to an already superb game.

The Atlantean civilization plays completely differently from the original Greek, Egyptian, and Norse civs. Atlantean villagers are much more efficient -- they don't require drop points -- but they take up more population slots and are more expensive. The Atlantean military is unique as well -- like the Egyptians, Atlantean players must primarily use counter-units early in the game. Though this is not exactly a disadvantage, it does require a reactionary style of play, depending on what units the enemy is sending. However, the Turma – ranged horsemen especially good at countering archers – are lethal multipurpose units equally suitable for defense or raiding. The resources require for making Turma -- wood and gold -- allow Atlantean players to horde their precious food early in the game and quickly advance to the heroic age, where a diverse complement of units awaits. However, despite the diversity, Atlanteans tend to be overmatched in late-heroic and mythical age games, which necessitates building a Titan as quickly as possible.

The addition of the powerful Titans, of course, is the most obvious change to the game. Each civilization has a different Titan that can only be summoned in the Mythic age after constructing an expensive and fragile "Titan Gate." In practice, the Titan is used much the way a Wonder is: to decide stalemates. And they are very effective at doing this. A difference of two minutes between Titan build times is generally enough to decide a game, since the first Titan can quickly destroy the second Titan Gate before the other Titan can emerge. And a Titan without another Titan opposing him generally means game over. The one exception is the neutralizing power of the Egyptian priests, which can sometimes be massed quickly enough to neutralize a Titan. Still, in the hands of a skilled player, the Titan is a lethal force to be reckoned with, since it is, in essence, a one-Titan army capable of decimating opposing troops, destroying buildings in seconds, and generally making life hell for the opposing player.

Subtler changes include myth units that spawn at temples after each age advance, new technologies, and several new multiplayer maps. The overall effect has been to greatly increase the nuances of online play, which is always welcome. However, there is also a brand new campaign with hours of new action. An army of Atlanteans has been stranded, pursued by enemy gods, and forced to fight through Norse, Egyptian, and Greek armies as they struggle to free their forbidden gods, the Titans.

AOM: The Titans is an excellent buy for anyone who enjoyed the original ***Age of Mythology***. The gameplay depth has increased, there's tons of new material for all of the civilizations, and the new campaign ensures plenty of action, even if the superb online multiplayer community is never explored.

Rating:

"An Inside Joke"

By Todd Deci

As a video gamer for many years now, I am probably like most other people who pursue a particular interest or hobby: I want to share the joys of my pastime with the people I love. I am always looking for games that my wife might like playing with me, for example, because I want her to experience these joys for herself. At the least, I hope it might help her understand a little better why playing games means so much to me. When I heard that the Game Boy Advance's WarioWare, Inc.: Mega Microgame$! was being converted into a GameCube party game, I figured it would present the perfect opportunity to bring an honest dose of classic gamer joy to my casual-gamer loved one.

A few months earlier, I'd borrowed a copy of the GBA version of WarioWare, and I was blown away. Never before had I played a game that was so accessible and familiar, yet at the same time so novel and inventive. The relentless flow of variety was intoxicating, and the mini-games themselves all felt so natural; so native, even. I never stopped to wonder why I felt this way. The day the GameCube version was released, I was jittery with excitement as I finally powered up the console and my wife turned on the Wavebird. I couldn't wait for her to experience the chaotic thrill ride of rapid-action mini-games, just as I had on the on the handheld. I couldn't wait to see her swept away, as I had been, in a deluge of nostalgia and innovation.

About 20 minutes later, she was flipping off her Wavebird and on her way upstairs to watch the news on the other television. "But…wasn't it any fun at all? Aren't you going to give it just one more try?" I pleaded. "Everyone loses at first -- it's part of the game. It's…part of the fun!" My wife is a good sport, though, and it wasn't the fact that she was losing that bothered her. It was that she never had any real idea of what she was supposed to be doing in the first place. Worse, she didn't understand why she was supposed to be doing it. Where's the fun in that?

I had assumed that as a party game, WarioWare would be the great equalizer. I had imagined that, since most people have never seen any of these particular mini-games before, and since half the challenge was in guessing what you were supposed to do on the spot, it would be the perfect multiplayer game for anyone, whether a true console connoisseur or completely oblivious to even Mario himself. After playing the game with my wife for less than half an hour, however, I've come to believe that the exact opposite is true.

Indeed, part of what makes the game fun is an urgent sense of the unknown. You're never sure which mini-game will pop up next, or what you'll need to do to be successful at it. But it takes more than lucky guessing or raw human instinct to fully know what each little game is about. I believe that, at least as much as anything else, what it takes to truly appreciate WarioWare is an intimate appreciation of all video games, through the last 30 years. WarioWare is a commemoration of classic gaming, as it cheerfully recycles hundreds of little patterns and standards found in games dating back to the golden age of Atari consoles. Yet to the unaware, this extensive collection of comforting conventions is only an insistent barrage of randomness.

For many of us who have enjoyed the video games of the last 20 or 30 years, there is no need to think about what to do when we are shown a Mario-looking platform character standing at one end of the screen and an object speeding towards him from the other. We jump. It's automatic. We don't wonder what's going to happen when the object reaches the character. We don't go through the thought process of deciding when to use our thumbs to press the button that makes the character jump. These things were internalized long ago, through all the platform games we've ever watched and played before. We just jump. It's as natural as driving a car, or walking down the street, or any other activity we've done so often that we don't even think about how we do it any more.

Not everyone instantly recognizes a Mario-looking platform game character just from seeing him on the screen, though. There are many people who look at a fluctuating power bar and don't intuitively know to try to stop it when it's "in the red." People who didn't grow up gaming don't automatically recognize those crude, pixilated, thoroughly traditional 8bit representations of everyday activities, such as driving a car or walking around. All of these conventional game elements are easy enough for anyone to figure out, of course, but it takes an internalized sense of context to know them on sight, without thinking. Unless you've experienced the countless classics and clones upon which WarioWare's mini-games are based -- unless you've actually lived a little classic gaming -- you're going to have to figure them all out from scratch.

What little story there is to WarioWare involves the inner workings of a fly-by-night video game design studio. Players are invited behind the scenes, to see the video game industry from the inside. Aside from the amusing endowment of mock trust, I can't think of a more graceful excuse to make a whole game out of five-second parodies and hackneyed rip-offs. I find the poetic irony and self-effacing humor endearing, and I've come to realize that this is the real reason that I find the whole game so irresistibly charming. With WarioWare, Nintendo has shared an inside joke with the rest of us longtime gamers, cunningly conceived and brilliantly told. Therefore, I think we should be both grateful and wary. Like any good inside joke, people who aren't "inside" just aren't going to get it. They'll walk away baffled, if not a little alienated.

And so, perhaps WarioWare is more universally accessible on the handheld than on the console. It's much easier not to get all the jokes if you can do it in private; in a group, no one wants to be the one guy who doesn't "get it." The next time my geeky old-school gamer friends come over to visit, maybe I'll pull out the GameCube copy of WarioWare and treat them to the esoteric, interactive history lesson it provides. Until then, though, I think I'll go buy my own copy of the GBA version. That way, my wife can watch the news on TV, and I can join her without feeling obliged to explain why each little mini-game is so scandalously cool or consummately clever. Besides, once the news is over, maybe she'll join me in a game of Super Monkey Ball 2. It seems she really "gets" that one. It's lucky that I'm a good sport too.

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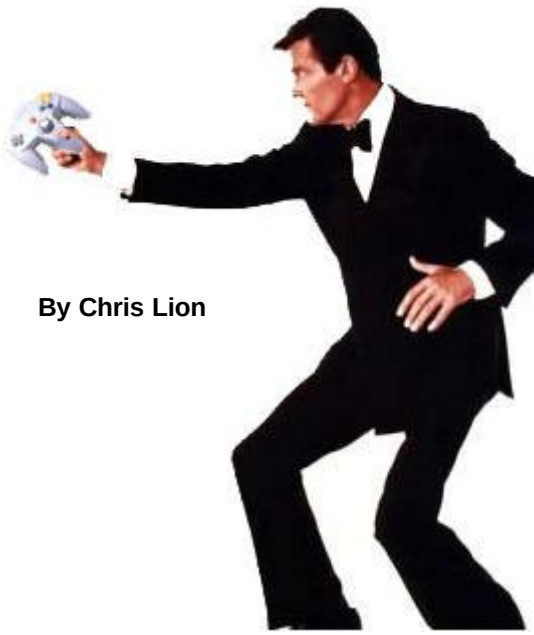

By Chris Lion

It wasn't until I was 25 that I realized I could really enjoy something in which I completely sucked the life out of. Last week I was over at a friend's house playing "**GoldenEye**." Good game. Lots of fun. There I was having a blast playing a game in which I am arguably the worst player ever.

My hand-eye coordination lacks a certain something: mostly my hands understanding anything that my eyes see and my eyes rolling up every time my hands do something so inane even they can't believe it: "I'm looking right at Trevelyan… why can't those hands manage to shoot him?" Hard to believe as it might be, but every time my eyes roll up in disbelief, I get shot. So if I sarcastically take my eyes off the screen, I die… who knew?

Roxy, my long-lost Atari 2600 buddy, has recently come back into my life, and brought with her a host of updated video game systems. Fun as this might be, it only makes me realize how bad I am at these games and why we lost touch in the first place. It's not what you're thinking, we didn't lose touch because of her excellent skills at these games. Nor was it her disastrous Madonna-wanna-be phase (which was odd, because she relentlessly listened to Journey). It was her love and affection for Roger Moore that ultimately drove us apart.

For many in my generation, Sean Connery is the quintessential bond, a perfect British Secret Agent: Cary Grant sophistication with the ability to kick some major ass. Yet he never did it for me. Even at age seven I could pick out the toupee -- not as bad as William Shatner's, but still pretty bad.

Timothy Dalton is frightening, albeit better than Moore. Dalton always bugged me because he always had a smug look on his face that seemed to say, "I'm feeling really good right now… and please don't go into the bathroom for at least 45 minutes." On the plus side, he looked as if he could fight; maybe not win, but at least make a go of it. Roger made my 93-year-old grandfather look spry.

The current Bond, Pierce Brosnan, is what I call wicked sexy (for a guy, anyway). He's cool and he knows it. He's got the accent thing working for him (women LOVE an accent), but it's not an upper crust tea-and-biscuit kind of accent—there's a harder edge he's working that makes it seriously cool. He walks into the room like he owns it. When he looks at a woman, he knows he could have her and no matter how hard to get she plays it, he will have her… probably several times.

But, Brosnan is best in a fight.

The Brosnan-Bond gets beat up a lot and really looks like he's getting the crap kicked out of him. Even though he's being shot at and tortured, he never looks like he's dying—he looks slightly shocked—in a don't-you-know-who-I-am?-look.

But what I like most about Brosnan-Bond is that when things blow up around him, he seems slightly pissed off. I keep waiting for him to shout to the henchmen of whatever villain he's fighting, "That last missile was a little close, and I don't want to lose my hearing before I'm 50… er, 50-ish… I'd prefer not to kill you, but I feel I might have to if you don't knock it off…" If I were a henchman and he were to ask, I'd stop. "But [evil villain's name], we're talking Bond here, I had to stop. Um, since I'm not shooting at him anymore, can I go home now?" Okay, that would never happen—mostly because I hear the Henchmen's Union has lousy deal (and no dental, can you believe that?)—but you get the idea.

Completely opposite of Brosnan-Bond limps the Roger Moore-Bond. Moore-Bond is the C. Montgomery Burns of action heroes. You'll notice at no time in any Moore-Bond film is there a stiff breeze, as the man would fall over and break something.

Even I could beat the Moore-Bond in a fight—and I've lost fights to more girls than I would ever admit in any publication. Moore-Bond never really fought, he walked… er, pranced…? no, he *waltzed* into a room and henchmen lunged and fell over as Moore-Bond flailed his arms around, trying to remain upright.

Maybe he had really bad BO? Could Q have invented a seriously rank odorant that only repelled villains but reeled in the babes? Because those henchmen fell pretty hard pretty fast and so did the ladies (the poor things).

I think what bothered me the most was that Moore-Bond always looked two steps from a broken hip. He just always seemed frail. Maybe that's why no one ever threw a real punch at Moore-Bond, they feared they might actually hurt him.

I will say, he always looked like he was enjoying being Bond. He'd waltz in, throw a fey-punch, order a drink and then look around the room as if to say, "Hello… I'm Bond, really I am, isn't it super?"

The fact that Roxy LOVED him and actually thought that sex with him was 1) not the most heinous thing in existence and 2) physically possible without him permanently damaging something would be too difficult a strain on any friendship.

The final straw was on a warm summer's day when were sitting around giving the Atari 2600 a rest from a rather wicked game of ***Breakout*** (hey, it *was* the 80s), when I saw her true and most shocking colors. We were talking about our favorite Bond films and I admitted that for some unknown reason, I kind of didn't hate *Moonraker,* to which Roxy cried out: "Puh-LEEEZE! The best Bond ever was *Octopussy*!" I didn't speak to Roxy again for almost 20 years.

I have never completely been able to fully grasp the issues of Northern Ireland, and I certainly couldn't explain anything within the ever-warring Middle East, but if someone were to say that it all started over a debate concerning *Octopussy*, I would fully understand.

For many years, Roxy believed that I had been threatened by her domination of any game on the Atari 2600. If that were the case, I wouldn't speak to my mother.

Today, I enjoy video games more than ever before -- and I'm playing worse than humanly possible. I suck so fully and completely that my four-year-old nephew doesn't like to play video games with me because I'll slow him down. But I'm having a wonderful time all the while I am at my sad, pathetic and absolute worst… I have, in fact, become Roger Moore.

Game Over

We want to hear from you. Send your comments, ideas and musings to:

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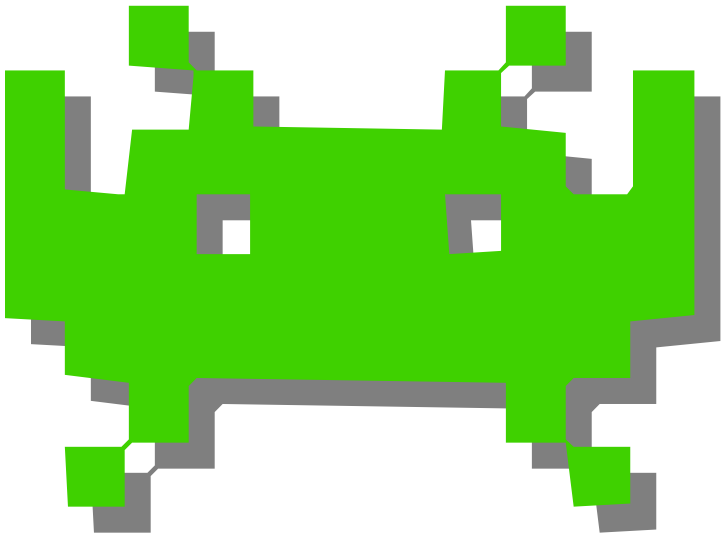

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